



Routledge Contemporary South Asia Series

KASHMIR AND THE FUTURE OF SOUTH ASIA

Edited by
Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal



Kashmir and the Future of South Asia

This book uses an innovative people-centered approach to the Kashmir problem to shed new light on why postcolonial partitions remain unfinished and why the wounds of postcolonial nation-state formation in South Asia continue to fester.

“Kashmir” is viewed as a metaphor for the permanent internal wars of partition that mark the South Asian experience. Chapters sensitively bring Kashmiri voices to the fore to examine Kashmir in the national discourses of India and Pakistan, resistance in the Kashmiri imagination and the Kashmir conflict in a global context. The book foregrounds how the space of Kashmir as a cultural, historical and political sphere persists and continues to haunt the postcolonial national present as the people of Kashmir and their cultural, literary and artistic productions cannot be contained within the regnant paradigms of the nations across which the region is partitioned. Additionally, the book explores how long-term resolution would demand engagement with historical forces, political actors and social formations that exceed the nation-state.

An important contribution to the study of this troubled region, this book will be of interest to academics and researchers of modern South Asian history and politics as well as comparative politics and international relations.

Sugata Bose is the Gardiner Professor of Oceanic History and Affairs at Harvard University, USA. His books include *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (2006), *His Majesty's Opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle Against Empire* (2011), *The Nation as Mother: And Other Visions of Nationhood* (2017) and, with Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (4th edition, 2017, also published by Routledge).

Ayesha Jalal is the Mary Richardson Professor of History at Tufts University, USA. Her books include *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam* (2000), *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* (2008), *The Pity of Partition: Manto's Life, Times and Work Across the India-Pakistan Divide* (2013) and, with Sugata Bose, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (4th edition, 2017, Routledge).



Figure 0.1 The Hazratbal Mosque in Srinagar



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**Edited by Sugata Bose
and Ayesha Jalal**

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Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	x
<i>Contributors</i>	xi
1 Introduction: freedom’s open wound	1
SUGATA BOSE AND AYESHA JALAL	
2 Kashmir scars: a terrible beauty is torn	10
AYESHA JALAL	
3 Cups of nun chai: 2010–ongoing	16
ALANA HUNT	
4 The state of <i>Azadi</i>: voices from Pakistan-administered Kashmir	36
ANAM ZAKARIA	
5 Affective governance, disaster, and the unfinished colonial project	53
SAIBA VARMA	
6 Infrastructures of occupation: mobility, immobility, and the politics of integration in Kashmir	71
MONA BHAN	
7 Narratives from exile: Kashmiri Pandits and their construction of the past	91
MRIDU RAI	

8 Kashmiri imaginings of freedom in the global arenas	116
SHAHLA HUSSAIN	
9 Kashmir and the fire this time	139
NIYA SHAHDAD	
10 Conclusion: healing the wound	143
SUGATA BOSE AND AYESHA JALAL	
<i>Index</i>	147

Figures

0.1	The Hazratbal Mosque in Srinagar	ii
3.1	Kashmir's Sense of Self – from the body of work “Cups of nun chai” (2010–ongoing) by Alana Hunt	27
3.2	Silence as Absence of Peace – from the body of work “Cups of nun chai” (2010–ongoing) by Alana Hunt	31
5.1	Soldiers and Civilians/Peace Is the Destination	60
5.2	Cover of the JKCCS report on the Kashmir floods	67

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Contributors

Mona Bhan is Associate Professor of Anthropology and the Ford Maxwell Professor of South Asian Studies at Syracuse University. Her books include *Counterinsurgency, Development, and the Politics of Identity: From Warfare to Welfare?* (Routledge, 2014) and *Kashmir, Resisting Occupation in Kashmir* (2018) co-edited with Haley Duschinski et al.

Sugata Bose is the Gardiner Professor of Oceanic History and Affairs at Harvard University. His books include *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (2006), *His Majesty's Opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle Against Empire* (2011), *The Nation as Mother: And Other Visions of Nationhood* (2017) and, with Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (4th edition, 2017).

Alana Hunt is an award-winning artist and writer who lives in the north-west of Australia. Since 2009 she has used a variety of mediums to illuminate political and social developments in Indian-administered Kashmir. Her sensitive interactive memorial Cups of nun chai (2010–ongoing) was a response to the death of 118 civilians in pro-freedom protests in 2010 across Kashmir.

Shahla Hussain is Assistant Professor in South Asian History at St. John's University in New York City. She is the author of *Kashmir's Cry for Freedom: Questions of Identity, Sovereignty and Self-Determination* (**forthcoming**).

Ayesha Jalal is the Mary Richardson Professor of History at Tufts University. Her books include *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam* (2000), *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* (2008), *The Pity of Partition: Manto's Life, Times and Work Across the India-Pakistan Divide* (2013) and, with Sugata Bose, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (4th edition, 2017).

Mridu Rai is Professor of History at Presidency University, Kolkata. She has written widely on Kashmir and is the author of *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights, and the History of Kashmir* (Princeton, 2004).

Niya Shahdad is a writer from Srinagar. She did her BA in English and Art History from Tufts University.

Saiba Varma is Assistant Professor of Medical Anthropology at University of California, San Diego. Her forthcoming book *Encountering Care: Medicine in a Zone of Occupation* looks at the ways clinical, medical and psychiatric practices as well as ethics and ideals have been reshaped by ongoing violence and militarization of Indian-occupied Kashmir.

Anam Zakaria is a development professional, educationist and writer based in Pakistan. She is the author of *The Footprints of Partition: Narrative of Four Generations* (2015) and *Between the Great Divide: A Journey into Pakistan-Administered Kashmir* (2018).

1 Introduction

Freedom's open wound

Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal

Acts of violence by colonial and postcolonial states are often given the veneer of legality, which typically falls well short of winning legitimacy. The resort to overwhelming force against pervasive civilian discontent is invariably a sign of weakness, not of strength. The widespread feeling of alienation in Kashmir is not new. But has the Narendra Modi regime's recklessness since 2019 finally lost Kashmir for India and driven the subcontinent to the precipice of an unprecedented crisis?

More than seven decades after independence from British colonial rule in South Asia, the people of the subcontinent continue to celebrate the joy of freedom and mourn the pity of partition. If the winning of independence was a proud achievement of the men and women who made huge sacrifices in the struggle for freedom, the moment of decolonization was tragically stained with the blood of innocent men, women and children who fell victim to the expedient British decision to divide and quit. Nearly a million people died, and some seventeen million refugees stumbled fearfully across the hastily drawn borders between India and Pakistan. The immediate human toll was greatest in the provinces of Punjab and Bengal on which the partitioner's axe cruelly fell. Well into the twenty-first century, it is Kashmir that remains freedom's open wound. The blood-letting continues in this region amidst severe restrictions on basic human freedoms and threatens to undermine the prospects of peace and prosperity for well over a billion inhabitants of the vast subcontinent.

The crisis exacerbated

On August 5, 2019, the special status for the state of Jammu and Kashmir in the Indian Union was summarily withdrawn by a Constitutional Order issued by the President and an indefinite lockdown imposed on the region. The autonomy for Jammu and Kashmir enshrined in Article 370 had been already whittled down by successive Congress regimes since 1954. A dead letter for decades, an audacious BJP government simply gave it an unceremonious burial. But it did much more. Paying scant regard to the norms of parliamentary democracy, it heaped humiliation on a regional people and declared its determination to achieve integration through the force of arms. A brazen and reckless assault on federalism

and democracy, the government's move was certain to provoke further alienation instead of nurturing a sense of belonging to the Indian Union.

The origins of Article 370 can be found in Article 306A, inserted by the Constituent Assembly as an interim measure in October 1949, limiting the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to defense, foreign affairs and communications. Following the Delhi Agreement in July 1952 between Jawaharlal Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah on Kashmir's autonomy, Article 306A was replaced by Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. After Sheikh Abdullah's imprisonment in August 1953, a Constitutional Order was promulgated by the President of India in 1954 upon the advice of Nehru's government empowering the central government to legislate on all subjects on the Union List, not only defense, foreign affairs and communication. The 1954 Order also imposed restrictions on fundamental rights and enabled the suspension of the freedom of speech and association on "grounds of security." In less than two years Article 370 had been reduced to a shadow and a husk of what it was originally meant to be. This has been the background of demands by pro-India Kashmiri parties for restoration of autonomy to its pre-1953 status.

In 1957 the Kashmir government headed by Bakshi Ghulam Muhammed adopted a new state constitution that acknowledged Jammu and Kashmir's status as "an integral part" of the Indian Union. The following year the central administrative services were brought into Kashmir through a constitutional amendment. Articles 356 and 357 of the Indian Constitution were made applicable to Jammu and Kashmir in 1964–1965 and would be misused in the 1980s to dismiss elected state governments. The state was brought under the purview of Article 249 enabling the central government to legislate even on matters on the provincial list. The governor and chief minister model replaced the more grandiose designations of the early 1950s' pacts on autonomy.

In substantive terms, therefore, the debate between political parties on whether to retain or repeal Article 370 had lost relevance, but it did have a symbolic residual value. As long as the BJP needed the support of regional allies, the issues of Article 370, Ayodhya and a uniform civil code had been put on the backburner. Now the government appeared to have decided that the time has come to throw all caution to the winds. The repeal of an article of the Constitution, attenuated though it was over the decades, had been preceded by honing the instruments of repression.

The choice of the route of a Presidential Order, read out by the Home Minister without any prior notice at 11 a.m. as Parliament convened, diminished the stature of India's parliamentary democracy. In colonial times the British masters had introduced a central legislature whose members could discuss but not vote on crucial pieces of legislation. After nearly seven decades of experience in parliamentary democracy, India's Parliament was reduced to discussing a *fait accompli* and rubber-stamping an autocratic decision in 2019.

The BJP government gratuitously added insult to injury by lowering the political status of the regional people of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. Falling short of the RSS's pernicious calls in the past to trifurcate the state along religious lines, the government's arbitrary decision to bifurcate dealt grievous injury to the

principles of federalism and democracy. A state aspiring for greater autonomy was reduced to two union territories. Atal Behari Vajpayee's invocation to *insaniyat* (humanity) counted for nothing among the current leaders of the BJP. The central government poured in nearly forty thousand security personnel into Kashmir on the eve of withdrawing the state's special status in addition to the more than half a million soldiers already stationed there. "Kashmir can be conquered by the power of spiritual merit," Kalhana had written in his twelfth-century chronicle *Rajtarangini*, "but never by the force of soldiers."¹ Narendra Modi, the prime minister, and Amit Shah, the home minister, have no time for that piece of sage advice. Genuine unity can never be achieved through forced centralization and fiat from above. A free and flexible federal union would have been a much stronger and longer-lasting Indian Union.

History versus presentism

Oh God, break this tyrannical grip
That has mauled the spirit of Kashmiri freedom.²

These stirring lines composed by Muhammad Iqbal, a Punjabi Muslim of Kashmiri ancestry, encapsulate the strong resonance that the predicament of Kashmiris has had in neighboring Punjab for nearly a century. The Kashmir–Punjab nexus has had a checkered history from the first mass uprising against Dogra rule in 1931 to the contemporary expressions of Kashmiri discontent. A historically grounded understanding of this inter-regional link is essential in any effort to seek a solution for the Kashmir problem based on making borders irrelevant.

Historical scholarship on Kashmir, especially the books by Mridu Rai and Chitralekha Zutshi, has shown that a regionally based linguistic identity in Kashmir was perfectly compatible with religiously informed universalism in the pre-colonial era.³ The century of indirect rule under colonialism qualitatively altered the equation between territorial and extraterritorial affiliations in Jammu and Kashmir. If the rulers constructed a specifically Hindu sovereignty, their subjects resorted to an Islamic idiom in articulating their resistance. The Dogra rulers imported the Ram cult into the Kashmir Valley from North India. Their Muslim subjects forged connections with the politics of their co-religionists in other regions, notably Punjab.

Close links were established during the 1930s between Kashmiri Muslim politics and Punjab. In the aftermath of the 1931 protests against princely authoritarianism in Srinagar, the rivalry between the Ahrars and the Ahmadis for political ascendancy in Punjab came to be fought on the terrain of Kashmir. Not just the poetry, but also the politics of Iqbal, exemplified this connection. The intersection of issues of class and sect with Kashmiri regional patriotism and religious universalism needs to be fathomed to get a clear sense of the border-crossing nature of Kashmiri politics.

The story of Punjab's intensely emotive relationship with the state of Jammu and Kashmir has deep historical roots. Kashmir formed a vital part of efforts by

some Punjabi Muslims in the 1930s to create a larger entity in order to better negotiate terms in political arrangements covering all of India. Kashmir, praised by a succession of poets as *jannat nazeer* or heavenly spectacle, and known for the autocracy of Dogra rulers over a predominantly poor Muslim population, was as enticing in conception as in its exquisite natural attributes. Unable to command the political heights in Punjab, stragglers from Khilafat committees and the Congress in the 1920s set their sights on Kashmir. Desperation or determination, the motivation behind the Majlis-i-Ahrar's sallies into Kashmir had everything to do with the politics of Punjab.

Kashmir's legendary beauty has meshed awkwardly with the destitution, illiteracy and infirmity of the vast majority of its people. Extreme poverty, exacerbated by a series of famines in the second half of the nineteenth century, resulted in many Kashmiris fleeing to neighboring Punjab. Kashmiris settled in other parts of India, especially Punjab and the North West Frontier Province, retained emotional and familial links with their original homeland. Like most diasporic movements, that of Kashmiri Muslims drew upon the myth of return and the vision of a free and prosperous Kashmir. Since the turn of the century, the Kashmiri Muslim Conference served as a venue to ventilate grievances against the Dogra administration and bemoan the lack of equal opportunities in their adopted homes. As one of the highest educated Kashmiris in Punjab, Muhammad Iqbal strongly supported the Kashmiri cause. His poetry is infused with a keen sense of belonging to Kashmir, the magnificent valley that the cruel hands of fate had reduced to abject slavery and benightedness.

But even the most inspired poetry could not incite a rebellion against the indomitable Dogra fortress until the early 1930s. Against the backdrop of a worldwide economic depression, heavy taxation of agricultural and commercial activities tightened the noose on an emaciated and dejected populace. Mounting economic distress and political disaffection found a ready outlet in Jammu where a police constable carried out a wanton act of sacrilege against the Quran. The incident, which occurred on June 6, 1931, created a commotion whose impact exceeded the expectations of the state authorities. Reactions were sharp in Muslim-majority Srinagar where youthful Kashmiri leaders like the Aligarh-educated Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah had recently established a reading group as a first step to raise popular consciousness. On June 21, Muslims assembled at the Srinagar Jamia mosque heard stringent critiques of the Dogra administration. Abdul Qadir, a cook from the NWFP in the service of an English officer vacationing in Kashmir, gave an inflammatory speech. He was immediately arrested, transforming him into a popular hero. When on July 13 Qadir was sentenced, the state forces fired upon a crowd of Kashmiri Muslims demanding to see him. Twenty-two perished on the spot, giving impetus to a long-delayed internal struggle for rights in Jammu and Kashmir.⁴

The Majlis-i-Ahrar moved swiftly to nail its colors to the cause of liberating thirty-two lakh Muslims in Kashmir. But the Ahrar bid for leadership of the agitation misfired when a gathering of prominent Muslims met in Simla to establish an All-India Kashmir Committee and, at Muhammad Iqbal's recommendation,

appointed Bashiruddin Mahmud, leader of the Qadian section of the Ahmadis as president. Looking to revive their glory days during the Khilafat era, the Ahrars used the fact of an Ahmadi at the helm to damn the Kashmir Committee as a British plant to sabotage efforts to enlist Kashmir into a larger Muslim whole. Short of funds, the Ahrars could not compete with the economic and political clout of the Kashmir Committee. Dubbing the committee as a mouthpiece of Qadian failed to do the trick since a mere eight or nine out of its 63 members could be identified as Ahmadis. Even the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Hind chose to work with the Kashmir Committee. After consulting their political mentor, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the Ahrars opted to work independently until time was right to assume control of the Kashmir agitation.

By the time Maharaja Hari Singh agreed to confer certain rights on his subjects, 34,000 Ahrar volunteers had filled jails in Punjab as well as Jammu and Kashmir. But the Ahrar demand for a responsible legislature was rejected. The Maharaja's Muslim subjects were instead given religious freedoms. For the first time in Kashmir's history, the state agreed to grant land rights to the actual cultivators. On the political front, the Maharaja's subjects could look forward to forming parties and bringing out newspapers according to the provisions of the press act operative in British India.

It was in the face of these newly won rights that on October 23, 1932, the Muslim Conference was established with Sheikh Abdullah as president. Graduating from the political margins of Punjab to the inner fringes of Jammu and Kashmir, the Ahrars in September 1932 formed the All-India Majlis-i-Ahrar and prevailed on Iqbal to ditch Bashiruddin, who they alleged was trying to convert Kashmiri Muslims into Ahmadis. Iqbal buckled under Ahrar pressure. Bashiruddin had to step down and Iqbal was elected as temporary president of the Kashmir Committee. All the prominent leaders of Kashmir, including Sheikh Abdullah, condemned the move. On June 18, 1933, Iqbal startled everyone by resigning as president and calling for a new Kashmir Committee whose membership would not be open to Ahmadis. Iqbal's first and final fling with sectarianism was described by one paper as a "very big *fitna*."

When it came to the crunch, the politics of class rather than doctrinal differences swayed Iqbal. For a man engaged in projecting the idea of a Muslim state in the north west of India, the illustrious Allama overlooked the problems that an exclusionary definition of Muslim identity could pose for both sovereignty and citizenship. Battling with other religious communities for power and privilege, Muslims in Punjab had begun extending their political horizons into neighboring regions. But the search for a Muslim "whole" heightened internal contestations along class, sectarian, regional and ideological lines. Basing Islam's much vaunted unity in difference on the logic of internal exclusion was a novel invention for which Punjab's urban middle-class leadership can rightfully claim credit. It is a legacy that continues to haunt the contemporary history of the Punjab-Kashmir nexus.

The interplay of regional patriotism and religious universalism in the colonial era has remained salient in Kashmir during the postcolonial era. Training

the spotlight exclusively on the terror networks that undoubtedly exist between Pakistani Punjab and Kashmir misses the broader contours of historical and kinship ties between the two regions that give the Kashmiri cause its emotive appeal beyond its strict regional borders. Yet the affinity felt in Punjab for Kashmir is differentiated along lines of class, sect, region and ideology as in the 1930s. While the Ahrar “mentality” has a certain currency among border-crossing networks of terror, there has been a perceptible shift in the tide of public opinion in Pakistani Punjab in the last two decades. Instead of wanting to incorporate Kashmir into Pakistan, the trend is toward letting Kashmiris shape their own destiny.

People, not territory

Nearly three decades ago – in an article titled “Kashmir Scars” reproduced as the opening essay in this volume – a hope had been expressed for the onset of a season when the pure white of Kashmir would not be stained with the blood of another young generation. It articulated a proposal for a just peace based on the idea of a sovereignty association and the dialectic of power and principle. It had been offered as an evocation of opportunity for a grand historic compromise on the subcontinent’s most divisive issue. Even then there was a recognition that the frozen postures in New Delhi’s and Islamabad’s corridors of power would not immediately melt. Twenty-eight bitter winters have since passed. With gun-toting and grenade-hurling “terrorists” having made way for mobile phone-wielding teenage resisters and a determined throng of stone-pelters, it is more urgent than ever for the subcontinent’s civil societies and transnational scholarly and activist communities to come together in the quest for a just peace in Kashmir. The intransigent official attitude of the existing juridical states threatens to ensure that when the snow melts next season only blood, mostly innocent blood, will flow.

This volume takes a people-centered approach to a problem that tends to be seen from statist and national security perspectives. Kashmiri voices are sensitively brought to the fore in Alana Hunt’s conversations with Kashmiris over *nun chai*. The novelty of her approach with its therapeutic and healing touch goes against the grain of so many of the toxic statist narratives about strife-ridden Kashmir. Her work blends her personal experiences in Kashmir and the invisibility of the situation in Kashmir for the outside world, while also engaging with the media in Kashmir to provoke a creative, critically engaged dialogue with the region. The very name of Kashmir can create tension with conflicting points of views on the subject – Indian, Pakistani, Kashmiri with infinite variations. Hunt’s conversations make it possible to move beyond the dominant paradigm of Indo-Pakistan relations. Her work creates the space that is needed for people to move out of their comfort zones without feeling threatened. She lures you in with a gripping, if tragic, narrative and forces you to listen, engage and come away feeling that one has somehow participated in the pain and agony of Kashmiris. There is a subtle but real subversive quality to the work. It gently but surely forces the audience to think outside the old and tired Indo-Pakistan national security dominated narratives and take cognizance of the human tragedy that has been ongoing in

Kashmir for decades. Sensitive and multidisciplinary in approach, “Cups of nun chai” connects history and international relations in creative and innovative ways.

The Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan is rarely viewed through the lens of those living outside the Valley. Countering official narratives on the Kashmir dispute, Anam Zakaria’s “The State of Azadi: Voices from Pakistan-administered Kashmir” turns the gaze on the forgotten victims of this long-standing conflict – the people of the Pakistani administered part of the disputed state known as “Azad Kashmir.” The militarization of space and spontaneous acts of resistance against the Indian state’s encroachments in everyday life is not the story of the Kashmir Valley alone but matched by rage and alienation at the military checkpoints and authoritarian controls by the Pakistani state in “Azad Kashmir.” Basing her narrative on stories told by those living along the Line of Control in homes battered by cross-border firing or in the squalor of makeshift refugee camps, she sensitively conveys the intricate and withering impact of the conflict on the psyches of ordinary Kashmiris caught in the cross fires of a conflict in which they have a high stake but no say. Engaging and moving, Zakaria breaks the silences in Pakistani statist narratives, proving that fact is stranger than fiction.

Saiba Varma’s “Affective Governance, Disaster and the Unfinished Colonial Project” provides a nuanced understanding of the language of humanitarian care that masks military repression by a postcolonial state. Sifting through the discourses on relief following the 2014 floods in Kashmir, she shows the dissonance between the state’s expectations and the peoples’ experiences in the aftermath of a natural disaster. The colonial attitudes of state officials are buttressed by the complicity of India’s national media. During our visit to the Valley in the summer of 2015 we were struck by the huge gap between Kashmiri narratives and Indian propaganda on the handling of the relief operations. Even pro-India Kashmiris had switched loyalties, hurt by what they perceived as betrayal and hypocrisy by the Indian state. Varma very subtly brings to light the ironic dialectic between the state’s humanitarian gestures and military repression.

The rhetoric of development has been deployed even more than the façade of humanitarianism to justify India’s claims to Kashmir. In the “Infrastructures of Occupation: Mobility, Immobility, and the Politics of Integration in Kashmir,” Mona Bhan deftly analyzes the implications of hydroelectric power projects in substantiating the Indian state’s territorial claims on Kashmir. The fresh impetus to the building of dams by the Narendra Modi regime was designed to quash regional autonomy while at the same time gravely threatening the fragile ecology of the region. Backed by international organizations like the World Bank, the Indian state’s developmental agenda undermined the decades-long Indus Water Treaty with Pakistan. Bahn’s sophisticated ethnographic research on tunneling toward development shows how the state negates popular conceptions of environmentally friendly development in addition to raising the chilling specter of future water wars in the subcontinent.

Mridu Rai’s “Narratives from Exile: Kashmiri Pandits and Their Construction of the Past” unravels the predicament of Hindus from the Valley who were forced to leave in 1990. She shows how a collective memory was constructed

following the displacement. Certain members of the Kashmiri Pandit community were more successful than others in retelling their pasts. Rai skillfully brings out the internal contestations within the Pandit community and the ways in which today's dominant narrative is closely intertwined with state power. Implicating the entire community of Kashmiri Muslims in the violent activities of a handful of militants is reminiscent of the British colonial project of handing down collective punishment. While the sufferings of Kashmiri Pandits are real, they have enabled the Indian state and the mainstream media to deflect attention from the pain inflicted on Kashmiri Muslims and to justify the state's punitive measures against them.

Despite the Indian insistence that Kashmir is an internal matter, the global diaspora of Kashmiris has been playing a role in internationalizing the issue and providing a much-needed fillip to the ongoing resistance in the Valley. In "Kashmiri Imaginings of Freedom in the Global Arenas," Shahla Hussain demonstrates how Kashmiri emigrant groups have resisted the marginalization and silencing of their partitioned homeland in the international arena in a mirror image of efforts to secure a more acceptable form of accommodation in their respective host countries. Her essay reveals how the situation in both parts of Kashmir continues to impact the politics of Kashmiri emigrants in countries like Britain and the United States. She also highlights the role played by transnational actors, ideas and movements of anti-colonial resistance in Asia and Africa, most notably Palestine, since the 1960s in fashioning Kashmiri ideas and strategies of resistance, freedom and social justice. Even as the international community maintains a shattering silence on this long-standing conflict in the interest of preserving the status quo, and India muzzles eight million Kashmiris, the voices of the Kashmiri diaspora are making sure that their tortured homeland and brutalized brothers and sisters will never be a dead or forgotten issue.

The existential dimensions of the Kashmir problem assumed crisis proportions with India's unprecedented lockdown of the Valley for an indefinite period. Niya Shahdad's "Kashmir and the Fire This Time," originally published in the *New York Times* of August 26, 2019, is a deeply touching and moving portrayal of the utter dehumanization of life in Srinagar following the clampdown of August 5, 2019. The mass arrests of ordinary people with no links to either militancy or politics; the midnight knocks that stole teenage boys from their sleep; the impunity with which thousands have been hoarded away into prisons within and outside Kashmir; the inability to communicate with one another or the rest of the world – these are the grim realities on the ground that Shahdad so poignantly captures.

There can be no solution to the Kashmir conflict, in which India and Pakistan have invested so much, if its people are left out in the cold. Where the land counts for everything, the battle to win the hearts and minds of its people is invariably lost. So it is premature to conclude, as some in India triumphantly did after the good turnout in the 2015 state elections, that the desire for *azadi* (freedom) has lost its appeal for Kashmiris. Voting for representatives who can address development issues and bring employment opportunities does not mean the elimination

of the deep-seated alienation felt by large sections of Kashmiris toward the Indian state. As Muhammad Iqbal, put it:

Jis khak Ke Zameer Main ho Atish-e-Chinar
Mumkin Naheen Ki Sard Ho Woh khake Arjmund.⁵

(A soil whose conscience has the spark of the *chinar* leaf, cannot ever go cold.)

Kashmiris will certainly respond to the “Modi hai to mumkin hai” with a resounding “Mumkin Naheen” to what was done to them on August 5, 2019.

Notes

- 1 M. A. Stein (ed. and trans.), *Kalhana's Rajtarangini: A Chronicle of the Kings of Kashmir* (Mirpur: Verinag Publishers, 1991).
- 2 The verse is part of a quatrain Iqbal penned for the *Kashmir Magazine*, October 1909; cited in Saleem Khan Gami, *Iqbal aur Kashmir*, second edition (Lahore: Universal Books, 1985), p. 93.
- 3 Mridu Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Rights and Religion in Kashmir, 1846–1947* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Chitrlekha Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging: Islam, Community and the State in Kashmir, 1880s to 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- 4 The discussion on the Kashmir–Punjab connection draws in large part on Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 342–370.
- 5 Muhammad Iqbal, ‘Armaghan-e-Hijaz’, in *Kulliyat-e-Iqbal* (Karachi: Al-Muslim Publishers, 1994), p. 187.

2 Kashmir scars

A terrible beauty is torn*

Ayesha Jalal

A glistening prize, a tantalizing dream, a festering sore – Kashmir is the fairy tale that tortures the South Asian psyche. “Like some supremely beautiful woman, whose beauty is almost impersonal and above human desire . . . Kashmir in all its feminine beauty . . . seemed . . . dreamlike and unreal, like the hopes and desires that fill us and so seldom find fulfillment,” wrote Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in 1940, after a 23-year absence from his ancestral land. Nehru likened Kashmir to the “face of the beloved that one sees in a dream and that fades away on awakening.” Instead of fading, however, the object of unrequited love was to become his obsession.

Another enchanted suitor – Pakistan – tried to lure Kashmir with better religious credentials for an arranged marriage. Tribal and *biraderi* (patrilineal kinship group) ties appeared to strengthen the religious bond and for a fleeting moment Pakistan nearly succeeded in snatching the prize from the grasp of the besotted Brahman. But religious and familial emotions were no match for the persevering Pandit, especially once he abandoned poetics for military theatrics. In 1949, after a war, about a third of the territory became Azad Kashmir, or Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. The rest remained Jammu and Kashmir, or India-occupied Kashmir.

Seeing the beloved in the infidel’s embrace sparked off a psychic conflagration in Pakistan. Without the “k,” meant to stand for Kashmir when the name was coined, PAISTAN (pronounced Pious tan – the land of the holy) was not quite Pakistan (the land of the pure).

Undoing the unholy union became a matter of life and death. But it entailed more death than life, since the infidel’s iron grip was much stronger than all the sophisticated armory the forlorn suitor could buy. And so the loss of Kashmir continued to rankle, erupting into two more short bloody wars, in 1965 and 1971, until observers of the spectacle separated the antagonists.

Whatever psychological, physical and political scars India and Pakistan have suffered over Kashmir, it is Kashmir that has invariably suffered more. Since January there has been a full-scale and popularly backed insurgency in the Valley. New Delhi’s charges of Pakistani complicity notwithstanding, Kashmiris in

* Originally published in *The New Republic*, July 23, 1990. pp. 17–20.

masses are openly demanding secession from the Indian Union. The current nightmare stems from the long-standing denial of self-determination, of the elementary right to choose whether to form a union at all, and if so with whom. The demand is being articulated variously by more than 30 groups – ranging from the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front's call for a secular and sovereign Kashmir to the fundamentalist's cry for an Islamic state closely aligned with Pakistan.

For this reason, the obsessive dimension in Indian and Pakistani attitudes toward Kashmir must be exorcised. The focus must be on Kashmir and its people. The challenge, and it is a formidable one, is to reconcile the principle of self-determination with the realities of regional power. If this challenge is not addressed urgently, the subcontinent and the world may well be plunged into a nuclear crisis.

Neither India nor Pakistan explicitly denies the principle of self-determination for Kashmiris. The conflict springs from different interpretations of the principle. Under the terms of the British transfer of power in 1947, Kashmir had to choose, like the other 500-odd princely states, between the two dominions. Independence was not an option. In the wake of Muslim tribal incursions from the northwest frontier (which was surreptitiously abetted by Pakistan), Kashmir's Hindu maharajah, Hari Singh, decided to cast his lot with the predominantly Hindu Indian Union. United Nations resolutions in 1948 and 1957 called for a plebiscite in Kashmir on the basis of the same principle. So both India and Pakistan have argued that there was never a third formal alternative of a sovereign and independent Kashmir. There have been unofficial hints that Pakistan now may be willing to consider an independent Kashmir, but they have been contradicted by Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. India remains emphatically opposed to the idea, on both legal and pragmatic grounds.

In fact, India has stolidly refused to countenance any arguments questioning the legality of Kashmir's accession. Yet its legality has never been accepted by Pakistan. More to the point, it was seen as provisional by the Lion of Kashmir, Sheikh Abdullah, who was the most influential of Kashmiri leaders from pre-Independence days until his death in 1982. (The Sheikh oscillated during his long career between demanding Kashmiri independence and accepting an autonomous status for Kashmir within the Indian Union.) Pakistan's claim on Kashmir on grounds of a common religious bond may be rejected for being *parti pris*. In any case, there has never been a neat equation between Kashmiri nationalism and the Islamic aspirations of the 3.3 million Muslims residing in the Valley; a sense of Kashmiri identity based on language, culture and environment has been as strong, if not stronger, than the ties of religious affiliation. The fact that it was Nehru himself who first proposed the idea of a plebiscite in November 1947, enabling Kashmiris to exercise their right to self-determination, lends credence to the notion that accession was provisional.

India's retort is well known. Pakistan's subsequent occupation of Azad Kashmir altered everything, leaving Nehru with no choice but to retract from his position on a plebiscite. But this retort overlooks a small detail: Nehru's promise to the Kashmiris was not contingent on Pakistan displaying good neighborly behavior.

Three different arguments have been aired against satisfying Kashmiri demands for self-determination. First and most extreme, there is the view that by acceding to India, Kashmiris have become a subnational group, and so their claims of self-determination cannot be given the same weight as those of subject populations under colonial rule. In other words, the principle of self-determination does not have universal applicability; to invoke it unreservedly is to pave the way for outright international anarchy. Gorbachev would endorse such a formulation wholeheartedly. Unfortunately for New Delhi and Moscow, neither the Kashmiris nor the Lithuanians agree that colonialism is at an end.

Then there is the argument that Kashmiris have exercised their right to “self-determination” by voting in four general elections. But these elections were to elect members of the state legislature within the framework of the Indian Union, and even these elections, especially those of 1987, have never been free or fair.

The more moderate view is that it is too late to question the legality of Kashmir’s accession to India. The only realistic solution is to give Kashmir greater autonomy based on an overall revision of federal and state relations in India. But the Hindu fundamentalist Bharatiya Janata Party has been calling for the revocation of Article 370 – the symbol of Kashmir’s special constitutional status in the Indian Union – which restricts the settlement and the acquisition of property in the state by non-Kashmiris. With this party holding the balance in India’s hung Parliament, adjustments in federal-state powers are unlikely to satisfy the aspirations of Kashmiri militants.

And even if New Delhi manages to dampen Kashmiri sentiments and reaches an agreement on the basis of greater autonomy, especially financial, within a significantly adjusted federal-state framework, the possibility of renewed troubles will remain so long as a section of Kashmir remains under Pakistani military occupation. This is all the more probable now that Pakistan’s monopoly over the instruments of coercion has been seriously dented by a sprawling arms and drugs economy: the flow of weapons in this region no longer requires state patronage. Moreover, with resurgent Islam spilling over international frontiers, Pakistan is no longer the sole potential patron of Kashmiri militants.

Given the rapidly changing regional and international environment, it would be myopic to believe that the existing configurations of power can determine what is a “realistic” solution to the Kashmir problem. Just as there can be no solution based on the principle of self-determination alone, none can be made to stick unless both India and Pakistan show flexibility in accommodating the new and emerging realities.

The agitations, coming at a time when Bhutto’s government was gearing for a detente with New Delhi, embarrassed Islamabad. Once officialdom in Islamabad recovered from the initial shock, the ruling troika – Bhutto, President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, and the army chief of staff, General Aslam Beg – reiterated the old Pakistani line of self-determination for Kashmiris, but carefully obfuscated the distinction between Kashmiri nationalism and Muslim aspirations. New Delhi’s virulent reactions to these Pakistani statements are understandable but misplaced. Pakistan cannot subscribe to India’s version of the history of the Kashmir dispute.

To interpret this as proof of Pakistan's involvement in Kashmir may be convincing propaganda for domestic consumption, but it does not address the source of the troubles in the Valley.

It is by no means clear that the Kashmiri militants – whether of the fundamentalist or the secular ilk – are angling for a confederation with Pakistan. Pro-Pakistani fervor may simply be the most potent symbol available to Kashmiris, one that dramatizes Kashmiri rejection of a union with India. India's bludgeoning the Valley into submission, far from eliminating pro-Pakistani sentiments, will create them, raising expectations in Azad Kashmir – and in Pakistan Punjab – of seeing all Kashmiris free of Indian control. Tribal and *biraderi* ties have resisted the disruptive effects of an arbitrarily imposed international frontier cutting across them. But expressions of concern and moral support for kinsmen across the border should not be taken as evidence of a subversive foreign hand. In Islamabad there seems to be a sense of the limits of power; circumspect state officials are not prepared to risk the future of Pakistan for a military adventure to regain a lost letter.

The voice of sanity seems to be drowning in the rhetoric of war, but there is still a trace of hope that moderation can prevail. What could be the contours of a political framework within which Kashmiri aspirations for self-determination will be satisfied while at the same time assuaging the fears and accommodating the interests of the two powerful states in the region?

For a start, the principle of self-determination should no longer be seen as precluding independence and reunion between the two Kashmirs. Indeed, it may well be the only long-term solution, now that the Vale of Kashmir is awash with anti-Indian feelings. Indian hopes of pacifying Kashmiris with offers of larger development grants and greater autonomy may still seem to be the more sensible option, but it is only a stop-gap measure.

Pragmatists assert that an independent Kashmir will be economically unviable. They may be right, but depressing facts and figures have rarely put the spanner through nationalist sentiment. The campaign for an independent Bangladesh (which many pragmatists supported enthusiastically) did not hold out the promise of a glorious economic future. And the woeful tale of economic development in the Valley and Azad Kashmir belies any notion of a prosperous future for the two parts of Kashmir within the Indian or Pakistani fold.

According to defense strategists, an independent Kashmir will be the vulnerable extremity of the subcontinent, an easy prey for China and any other expansionist power. But surely keeping Kashmir subservient and divided between them may cost India and Pakistan a great deal more in blood and iron, entailing more instability for the subcontinent, than a reunified and independent Kashmir.

It has also been argued that an independent Kashmir, much less a reunified one, is simply impracticable without domestic political stability in India and Pakistan and a relaxation of regional and international tensions. Kashmiri unification and independence would create an unhealthy precedent for other subnational groups harboring separatist illusions. But unless these groups are being held under threat of coercion, there is no reason why an independent Kashmir should precipitate the balkanization of the South Asian subcontinent.

Pragmatists add that an independent Kashmir will strengthen the hands of communal and fundamentalist ideologues in both countries. But surely it is more likely that unsatisfied Kashmiri aspirations would provide greater impetus to resurgent communalism and fundamentalism in India and Pakistan than an independent Kashmir based on the secularist principles now being enunciated by some of the more important militant groups in the Valley. These groups, particularly the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, have been espousing non-communal creeds and assuring non-Muslims full rights as equal citizens in a free Kashmir.

Given a measure of flexibility, the fears and the interests of the two main regional powers can be accommodated within a political framework for a reunified and independent Kashmir.

The arrangement would be based on “sovereignty-association” with both India and Pakistan. This notion of sovereignty-association differs in essentials from the idea of an Indo-Pakistan condominium over Kashmir, which negates the right of Kashmiri self-determination. It is also at complete variance with the concept of a loose confederation between India, Pakistan and Kashmir, which overlooks the great variations in the composition and character of these three political entities.

Sovereignty-association implies, first, the recognition of the national rather than simply the minority status of a distinctive community; and second, the negotiations of an association of this nation with a larger multinational state. Underlying this concept is a broad and imaginative interpretation of sovereignty. It is only an emphasis on power to the exclusion of principle, on the reality of existing states to the detriment of aspirations of people, which can sustain absolutist notions of sovereignty in today’s world. A more realistic perspective may lead to the notion of layers of sovereignty and enable the much-needed reconciliation of power with principle, of authority with freedom.

For sovereignty-association to work in Kashmir, India and Pakistan will have to agree to extend the right of self-determination to all Kashmiris – Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist. The features that have made the UN resolutions on a plebiscite unworkable for more than four decades must be altered. A plebiscite or referendum will be held first in Jammu and Kashmir, including Ladakh, to determine whether to remain with the Indian Union or to opt for independence and possible union with Azad Kashmir. Leaving Azad Kashmir out of the first round of voting and replacing the option of joining Pakistan with the option for independence, takes account of Indian fears; and if a free and fair vote is cast in favor retaining the union with India, the Kashmiri right of self-determination would have been exercised.

India and Pakistan could then negotiate a treaty settling the boundary dispute once and for all. If a majority votes for independence, however, the union with India will stand annulled. In the event that Hindu-majority Jammu and Buddhist-majority Ladakh vote overwhelmingly against independence, despite an overall majority for independence, an allowance should be given for these regions to remain with India.

Azad Kashmir could then vote to decide whether to unite with the rest of Kashmir on the basis of a sovereignty-association with Pakistan. If both parts of

Kashmir decide on independence, a constituent assembly of Kashmir as a whole will ratify the terms of association with the two regional powers. New Delhi and Islamabad can accommodate the new association within their constitutions. Indian and Pakistani troops will be withdrawn and Kashmir declared a demilitarized zone with its territorial integrity guaranteed by both countries. (The terms of the sovereignty-association may allow India and Pakistan to maintain a limited military presence in Ladakh and the Afghan border respectively, to meet the strategic concerns of each country about potential threats emanating from outside the South Asian region.)

Admittedly, obsessive passions, fears and suspicions are not easy to exorcise. Kashmir in all its natural splendor has elicited more possessive greed and murderous conflict than detached love. Kashmir today is a valley of despair in need of compassion from those who have been so enchanted by its spell. This proposal based on a dialectic of power and principle is an evocation of opportunity for a grand historic compromise on the subcontinent's most divisive issue. It will in all probability not immediately melt the frozen postures in New Delhi's and Islamabad's corridors of power. But it is being articulated boldly because a season must eventually come when the pure white of Kashmir is not stained with the blood of another young generation.

3 Cups of nun chai

2010–ongoing

Alana Hunt

“Cups of nun chai” is a search for meaning in the face of something so brutal it appears absurd. It is an absurd gesture when meaning itself becomes too much to bear. It is also a memorial, grounded in the killing of 118 civilians during protests that roiled Indian-controlled Kashmir during the summer of 2010.

When the protests began in June 2010 I had just returned to Australia after almost three years in New Delhi, a time in which I had begun to visit and form friendships with people in Kashmir. Suddenly I found myself in Sydney watching the number of dead in Kashmir rise day by day. I communicated online with friends in Kashmir, caught under conditions of a curfew they knew all too well and whose experiences were never featured on media broadcasts that counted only the dead.

Weeks earlier I had glimpsed the way death from political violence becomes normalized in Kashmir, one part of the everyday fabric of life. Men lured to the mountains with the promise of jobs were murdered by soldiers and passed off as militants (for a reward). A cable TV operator was assassinated one evening in his home. A political worker was killed one morning in a marketplace. Several people, including children, had already been killed in Kashmir by India’s armed forces in 2010, and the region simmered with anger. So when Tufail Ahmad Mattoo was fatally hit by a tear gas canister as the 17-year-old made his way home from tuition, Kashmir revolted. Hundreds of thousands of people came out on the streets in protests demanding independence from Indian rule. Over 118 people were killed in almost as many days. Meanwhile, Australia barely took note; amidst the 24-hour news cycle there was a gaping silence, and other lives simply went on. Indifferent. Unaware. Elsewhere.

“Cups of nun chai” is born out of that juncture. It is as personal as it is political, as geographically and culturally dislocated as it is grounded. It began as a gesture toward the people of Kashmir who feel and know this loss the most, and an attempt to render tangible what so many outside Kashmir do not know. The work moves against the normalization of violence, in an attempt to mark this loss, and to grasp at what surrounds it. It is an archive of small moments, remembered within a terrain shaped by the persistent violence of colonization and nation making.

“Cups of nun chai” unfolded over two years of tea and conversations with 118 people, most of them in Australia, some in India, and finally some back in

Kashmir. There were no rules, so long as each person understood their cup of *nun chai* formed one part of a growing memorial for those who were killed during the summer of 2010 in Kashmir. Navigating the time and space crafted by these cups of tea – at times with complete strangers – each conversation drew on the specific individual, and on its specific location, tracing connections with Kashmir across the shared global heritage of colonial violence, particularly within South Asia and Australia. Also, and most importantly, forms of resistance to it – from political coups and mass mobilization, to poetry, rap music, and journalism, to the vitality of the domestic sphere, and the power of dreams and gesture.

Each cup of tea was photographed and each conversation written about from memory, and these images and words accumulated progressively online. “Cups of nun chai” has also been included in exhibitions and events in Australia, in the United States, in Indonesia, and in Pakistan. In June 2016, on the anniversary of Tufail Ahmad Mattoo’s killing, “Cups of nun chai” began to circulate in the Srinagar-based newspaper *Kashmir Reader*, like an undercover exhibition slipping within the folds of a newspaper, reaching tens of thousands of people each week over a period of 11 months.

Amidst a renewed government crackdown on civil society following the killing of the popular rebel commander Burhan Wani, *Kashmir Reader* was banned in October 2016 and remained out of circulation for three uncertain months. The newspaper ban is just one of the many and ongoing pressures the Indian state exerts on Kashmir’s fragile, yet determined, media fraternity. “Cups of nun chai” found itself published amid daily news in the pages of *Kashmir Reader*, colliding with the memory of 2010, and blurring the formal lines between art work and historical document.

Like an ever-growing memory, “Cups of nun chai” has brewed into various iterations; tea, conversation, website, newspaper serial, exhibition, archive, reading, discussion, and in 2020 it was published in full by Yaarbalk Books, New Delhi. These are excerpts from that book.

www.cupsofnunchai.com

Remembrance with hope and faith

The first cup

3 October 2010

I sat with my aunt in her home in suburban Sydney. This house, and for that matter the whole suburb, had been built in the aftermath of World War II as part of the government’s attempt to provide returning soldiers with affordable housing. In a home that once housed trauma, we shared tea in the name of death. Death in a place so distant from here it was almost invisible. But this made it all the more necessary to speak.

I left Kashmir early in the evening on 9 June and reached Delhi two days later, via a slow journey by road and train. That was the day, 11 June 2010, that Tufail Ahmed Mattoo was killed when a tear gas canister fired by the Jammu and

Kashmir Police hit him on the head as he passed a demonstration near his home in downtown Srinagar. Tufail was 17 years old when he died. He was a boy, on his way home from tuition, carrying books in a bag on his back.

Demonstrations are a part of the everyday in Kashmir; death too. Fourteen civilians were killed in the first months of 2010, including five boys between 14 and 19 years of age. In late April three unarmed men were shot in the forests of Machil, Kupwara, by an army unit who described them as “militants killed in an encounter.” Tufail’s death was not the first of its kind, nor was it the last, but it renewed a fierce sentiment that spread across the Valley during the summer months of 2010.

The slogan “Go India! Go back!” was shouted on the streets and in the fields. It appeared in rough, desperately written graffiti on the city walls – in the mofussil, straight on the road, like traffic markers – in status updates on social media, and it was in the weight of a stone hurled at Indian soldiers. In response to the protests, the slogans, and the stones, over the course of four months, the Indian state’s armed forces killed more than 118 people – mostly young men in their late teens or early twenties. Thousands were injured.

But none of this violence, nor the urgency of Kashmir’s political will, has emerged overnight. Over the last two decades more than 70,000 people have lost their lives to Kashmir’s struggle for *azadi*. In a sense, this struggle was born nearly 70 years ago, in the aftermath of World War II, with the downfall of the British Empire, the consequent Partition of South Asia, and the formation of India and Pakistan as modern nation-states. In another sense, *zulm*, tyranny in Kashmiri, is a centuries-long story of foreign rule at the hands of the Mughals, the Afghans, the Sikhs, and the Dogras.

My aunt gasped at Tufail’s age. Overwhelmed by the complexity of the situation that had brought about this conversation, she said, “It feels impossible to imagine a solution.” Impossible to imagine a solution? Perhaps. Yet, at the same time, it is so important to keep on imagining every possible (and impossible) solution.

I once met a principal at a higher secondary college in Kupwara district. When some young Kashmiri friends asked if he thought there could ever be a solution to the situation in Kashmir, he responded with a surprising lightness, “Yes, of course there will be. Look around the world – there are so many situations similar to Kashmir that have been solved. So why not ours also?” He went on with the eloquence of a well-practiced teacher, “Just think of South Africa, of East Timor and of course India’s own fight against the British. What makes you think our story is any different?”

My aunt hesitated, “But things in East Timor haven’t really been solved. East Timor is one of the poorest countries in the world.” When I asked what she meant by poor, she responded plainly, “One meal a day. You know one of the ironies of Australia’s proposed offshore detention centre in East Timor is that those detained will receive three meals a day while the locals will have a hard time finding one.”

Freedom, like happiness, can never really be held on to or materially grasped. It is effervescent and fleeting. When Kashmir attains freedom there will, no doubt,

be more un-freedoms to come, as from happiness there will inevitably follow unhappiness. These are slippery ideas and experiences, which makes it all the more urgent for us to carve out spaces they can slide into. Spaces that can stifle the complicity and willful forgetfulness that we are all a part of.

My aunt went on to explain, “There is an Indian priest at my local parish. He always says that you can’t have hope without faith. My other friend says that hope gives us resilience. But it’s ironic that India itself fought against the British, and today they’re the ones occupying Kashmir.”

In the midst of World War II – when Australian soldiers, who would later live in the building that became home to my aunt, were fighting against the Nazis, only a few years before Kashmir was divided between India and Pakistan – Arthur Koestler wrote:

I believe in spiral nebulae, can see them in a telescope and express their distance in figures; but they have a lower degree of reality for me than the inkpot on my table. Distance in space and time degrades intensity of awareness. So does magnitude. Seventeen is a figure which I know intimately like a friend; fifty billions is just a sound. A dog run over by a car upsets our emotional balance and digestion; three million Jews killed in Poland cause but a moderate uneasiness. Statistics don't bleed; it is the detail which counts. We are unable to embrace the total process with our awareness; we can only focus on little lumps of reality.

The catch 22 of Kashmir

The thirty-ninth cup
11 February 2011

Lucas and I met at the Chinese Gardens – an artificial pocket of green plants, big stones, moving water, and calm nestled in the heart of Sydney. We were chatting. I poured the *nun chai*. There was a small hill with pine trees and green grass. It reminded me of Kashmir but as a miniature, constrained version. It was as though a piece of a mountain from Kashmir had been captured in the heart of Sydney and made into a bonsai. Agha Shahid Ali, the Kashmiri-American poet, captured this sense in *Postcard from Kashmir* from the 1992 collection *Half-inch Himalayas*:

*Kashmir shrinks into my mailbox
my home a neat four by six inches
I always love neatness
Now I hold
The half-inch Himalayas in my hand*

This hill was just behind Lucas, so from my perspective the bonsai mountain of Kashmir framed our conversation. In my mind two competing narratives were

fighting for space on it; one in civilian clothes, the other in a military uniform. Kashmir's green is so different to army green. At only eight years of age Sameer Ahmed Rah was the 39th person to die in Kashmir during the summer of 2010. Eight years is so young. As I spoke, Lucas pulled a red notebook from his bag and asked me to sketch a map of Kashmir for him. First I drew a line marking the Himalayan belt. Below I drew the triangular shape of India, which extended on the right into Bangladesh and South East Asia, and on the left into Pakistan. It was on the left side of the line that marked the Himalayas, where India, Pakistan, and China all more or less meet, that I began to sketch in the shape of Kashmir – or rather the shape that Kashmir was, prior to the Partition of British India in 1947. I marked in the different regions that make up Kashmir, and then I drew a series of lines that illustrated its current occupation by India, Pakistan, and China. As I put marks on Lucas' paper, we spoke about Kashmir's history and how the situation today came about.

"It is probably a really silly question, but is Cashmere wool actually from Kashmir?" Lucas' question reminded me once more of the writings of Agha Shahid Ali: *Let me cry out in that void, say it as I can. I write on that void: Kashmir, Kaschmir, Cashmere, Qashmir, Cashmir, Cashmire, Kashmere, Cachemire, Cushmeer, Cachmiere, Casmir. Or Cauchemar in a sea of stories? Or: Kacmir, Kaschemir, Kasmere, Kachmire, Kasmir. Kerseymere?*

Lucas has completed a PhD on "blogging as art." He told me about his work, the blogs he had developed and described how blogging itself can have a kind of snowball effect, particularly for process and participatory-based art. "Blogging about a particular experience has the capacity to shape consequent experiences – as people read and engage, the material influences their behaviour." I understood what Lucas was saying because of the way my own work about Kashmir had been unfolding online. But the way Lucas spoke of this snowballing capacity seemed to speak even more directly to the capacities of online activism in Kashmir today.

In the summer of 2010, the Indian government arrested several Facebook users in Kashmir for what the state claimed were "anti-national" activities. However, it is precisely because of the internet that news of their arrest was able to spread like wildfire. Through the internet, things like social media, blogging and independent publishing have come to exercise an increasing degree of power due to the immense speed and distance at which information can circulate. There is a lively online community in Kashmir circulating not only information and news, but also music, literature, and photography that conveys profound personal sentiment. This online community also watches the world closely, supporting, comparing, and learning from the likes of Egypt's 25 January movement.

In a 2003 preface to a collection of writings from the mid-1980s, the writer and anarchist Hakim Bey dismissed his initial belief that the internet offered a kind of "pirate utopia," arguing that instead it had become a "perfect mirror of global capital." While the internet is not utopic, in the sense that Bey had once envisioned, there is still great potential. People are always finding ways to work the internet to their advantage. It is just that the state tries to do the same.

I explained to Lucas how horrible it was that people could actually be killed by the Indian state in Kashmir faster than I was able to have cups of *nun chai* with people in Sydney. Lucas remarked, “It sounds like Joseph Heller’s *Catch 22*. Have you read it?” A day or so later I picked up a copy of Heller’s novel at a second-hand book market. The commentary on the back cover read: *at the heart of Catch 22 is a savage indictment of twentieth century madness, and a desire of the ordinary man to survive it.*

A gaping silence

The forty-first cup
20 February 2011

London Plane trees, very similar to the famous Chinar trees of Kashmir, surrounded Amity and I in an inner-city Sydney park. These large deciduous trees were mostly green, but some of their star-like leaves, colored in shades of yellow and orange, had begun falling to the ground. I could see Kashmir in the canopy that shaded us from Sydney’s heat. The fact that Kashmir’s most iconic tree is most commonly referred to in Kashmir by its Persian name, “Chinar” – as opposed to the Kashmiri “boonyi” – is testimony to the creeping, banal, multifaceted nature of occupation, and how the cultural pendulum swings as much to one side of colonization as it is pulled to another.

Chinar trees are state property in Kashmir, as is the land on which they are growing. This discourages the planting and growth of new Chinar trees, as people uproot them before they grow large enough to be noticed by government agencies, for fear of losing land to the government. As my friend Arif pointed out, this makes the most majestic and iconic of trees in Kashmir an enemy of the people, and the people are made an enemy of it. There are pressing environmental issues here, but the process of registering trees and rendering them state property feels synonymous with the various kinds of control the occupation exerts on people through mechanisms like identity cards.

“How did your friends in Kashmir handle things last summer?” Amity asked. For many, the violence was outside their front doors. Brutality was in their faces. Anxiety constant. Curfews were almost continuous. This meant markets were closed and people lost access to even the most basic supplies. People could not leave their homes for months. Families lost their income and schools sat idle. The postal service was sketchy. Phone connections and the internet were intermittently cut, whenever the state deemed it “necessary.” Hospitals were full and understaffed and had limited supplies. Reports circulated that Indian security forces had actually raided some hospitals, assaulting patients and staff.

As the extent of the occupation emerged, Amity sighed, “We were so naive when we visited Kashmir. We just jumped on a plane and had no idea.” In 2005, Amity and her friend were traveling around India. After hearing about the must-see-beauty of Kashmir they decided to visit Srinagar. “I remember, immediately after landing, the presence of the military. It was like nowhere else we had visited

in India. There were a lot of guns and men in uniform, but no one really explained why.” Amity and her friend stayed in a houseboat on Dal Lake towards the end of a Kashmiri winter. “It was beautiful, but I kept trying to imagine what it would be like in the full bloom of summer.” Amity didn’t recall an official curfew, but the houseboat owners had told them to be home before dark. “The streets felt desolate. We didn’t see any other foreigners. Only the soldiers and their guns. There was tension in the air, but no one ever explained what it was about.” Amity continued, “I remember being given a basket of hot coals while riding in a shikara on the Dal Lake. It was beautiful.” As the only tourists, the small income Amity’s visit brought to families reliant on tourism in Kashmir must have been significant.

Most tourists are told these “baskets of hot coals” are called kangri, a more palatable version of *kānger*, which is what it is called in *Koshur*, the Kashmiri language. Foreign palatability is not without significance in Kashmir, particularly when it comes to tourism. While being told about the beauty of Kashmir, while booking a plane ticket to Srinagar, while staying on the Dal Lake, while moving through the city’s streets, while visiting Gulmarg and then returning to North India, it speaks volumes that no one had properly discussed or even hinted at the situation in Kashmir to Amity or her friend. There was a gaping silence. Perhaps because it was an unpalatable truth.

When we were at Gulmarg an old man was pulling us up the hill on a snow sled. I felt so uncomfortable that this elderly man was pulling my body up a mountain, so I got out and offered to pull him. But I just confused the whole thing more. I felt awkward about a lot of things like this often.

Amity’s experience brought to mind a scene from Sanjay Kak’s documentary *Jashn-e-Azadi* (How We Celebrate Freedom). Only, in this film the tourists don’t get off the sled to help. This particular sequence juxtaposes three scenes: Indian tourists sitting on a sled in the snow, pulled up a hill by an elderly Kashmiri man wearing a *pheran*; the dead body of a young boy held by his mother, while cries for *azadi* echo in the background; and the rolling green hills of a newly developed golf course. One of the Indian tourists going gung-ho about the beauty of Kashmir says, “Yeh in logon ne barbaad kar diya” (These people – Kashmiris – have destroyed this place). The film’s narration states: *As an enforced normality is dressed up as triumph, economic opportunism arrives – disguised as peace.*

Geography, periphery, women, and independence

The ninetieth and ninety-first cup
6 June 2012

It was morning when I sat to have *nun chai* with Uma and Basi. We were in Nainital, a small city by a beautiful lake in the hills of Uttarakhand, a North Indian state in the lower Himalayas.

I explained in careful and deliberate detail how Cups of nun chai came about and soon learnt that Kashmir's story was not entirely unfamiliar to Uma and Basi's own experiences. Uttarakhand's independence from the state of Uttar Pradesh was only 12 years ago, and it was not independence from the nation of India. But as our conversation unfolded, it became clear that Uttarakhand's recent history had more in common with Kashmir than one might first expect to find. This included not only stories of state repression and violence but also anecdotes from corresponding periods of time, the cultural politics of the hills in relation to the plains, tactics of protest, stone-throwing, and the state's use of sexual violence. Uma and Basi were wise, experienced women who, despite having children who were now adults, still stood against injustice with a youthful fire burning strong in their bellies.

"The sentiment for an independent state had been in the air here since the early 1950s, but it was not really until 1994 that the movement took shape." Uma explained, "This was because of a reservation that privileged the plains people of Uttar Pradesh, over our hills."

"It was a dangerous time," Basi added, "but women were part of the movement in big ways."

Historically, women in the hills have always been more active than those in the plains. We've been working the fields and in the jungles, so when the time came it only seemed natural to get to work politically as well.

Uma and Basi told me about Sarla Behen, an Anglo-Indian from Uttarakhand, who went underground during the National Movement in the early 1940s. Sarla Behen used to visit villages in the night, bringing supplies and information to women whose husbands had been imprisoned by the British. I asked if Sarla Behen was a figure Uma and Basi had known since childhood, "No, not at all," said Uma. "We only uncovered her story at college. But now after Uttarakhand's independence, Sarla Behen's role in our history is beginning to enter the school system. Bit by bit we're making sure our own histories are told."

"Our role as women in the movement was different to the men. Women can intervene calmly, we give direction and clarity when situations become fiery and chaotic," said Basi. At one point in Nainital there had been shooting and stone-throwing between the police and male civilians.

We intervened, and pleaded with the police to stop shooting at unarmed people. They told us, if we could convince the men to drop their stones they would drop their guns. But when our men dropped their stones the police continued firing.

This event instilled in Basi and Uma a deep sense of the state's betrayal, which enabled them to empathize more closely with present-day Kashmir.

Uma and Basi spoke a lot about the state repression that took place during Uttarakhand's struggle for independence. The instance that stood out most occurred

in early October 1994, in Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh. Uma and Basi said the streetlights had been turned off, in wait for busloads of people demanding an independent Uttarakhand, who were on their way to a sit-in protest in Delhi. In the cover of darkness, the police stopped the buses. Men were beaten and killed. Women were raped and found naked in the fields. This evening came to be known as Muzaffarnagar Kand, or the Rampur Tiraha firing case. Uma said it was too difficult to speak in more detail. There were tears and fire in her eyes. After this event a women's group called Uttarakhand Mahila Manch was formed, which, in November 1994, brought women to Nainital from all over Uttarakhand for a major female-only protest in response to the state's violence against women.

The first of these events in Uttarakhand were taking place concurrently with the first years of armed struggle in Kashmir. I asked Uma and Basi what they knew of Kashmir during the summer of 2010. Uma spoke of curfews and fear. Basi criticized the Indian media for distorting the truth of the situation. She had once traveled to Kashmir with her family for a holiday. A man named Ahmed had been their tour guide. At one point someone from the army had throttled Ahmed around the neck, right in front of the tourists and called him a "saale." This is a derogatory term used across South Asia, almost always in the first person, implying you have "taken" the listener's sister in legal marriage. The fact that this was spoken by a soldier to a Kashmiri civilian is illustrative of the state's coercive use of sexual violence and its perceived legal "ownership" of Kashmir as a territory as much as a body. "I was shocked." Basi continued, "I asked Ahmed what it was all about and he just looked at me with faint tears in his eyes and said: 'this is life in Kashmir.'"

Unwritten, not forgotten

The ninety-fourth and ninety-fifth cup
23 June 2012

Nasir held the *nun chai* in his hands and spoke earnestly: "The symbolism of these cups is strong." I met Nasir and Burhan under the Chinar trees at Kashmir University. I had just described in detail how Cups of nun chai began – how the work was an attempt to move against the normalization of death in Kashmir, how it was a response to the loss of life in 2010, to the duality of what was at once horribly tangible and at the same time inconceivable, especially so for me, someone not from Kashmir.

Burhan had been very quiet while I spoke, listening carefully, "I didn't realise – I mean, your website doesn't really convey what you've just said." From that point on, our conversation flowed for hours. It felt like an endless exposition describing how two young men who yearn for *azadi* negotiate their way through life in Kashmir today. 2010 was a year Nasir and Burhan's generation would never forget.

Nasir and Burhan's understanding of the political situation that shaped their lives was nuanced; words had consequences in Kashmir, and this made them more precise with language. Kashmir was not "administered" by India, but rather "held" and "occupied." They told me that "Ikwhan" is an Arabic word originally meaning "brother."

However, the Indian state has used this word to describe former militants-turned-Indian-loyalists. So locally an "Ikwhani" was a brother to the Indian state and a traitor to Kashmir. Nasir and Burhan were conscious not only of India's military might but also of its coercive power. We discussed some of the government strategies they felt were aimed at shaping the way young people think.

In 2010, individuals were detained in Kashmir for engaging in what the state perceived to be "anti-national activities" on social-networking sites. Nasir and Burhan explained that because this received negative press coverage internationally the state had started to fabricate alternative reasons for detaining people who use the internet to voice political concerns in Kashmir. The mere suggestion that someone had been involved in street violence was enough to get you detained under the much abused and draconian Public Safety Act. Families whose children were booked under the PSA were often dealt hefty fines and had a black mark in the state's records leveled against their name. These limited future employment opportunities and placed immense financial pressure on the family at large. Thousands of people have been booked under the PSA in recent years. Now, in Kashmir in mid-2012, it feels as though the state is succeeding in making people quiet in very quiet ways.

Like hundreds of other young boys in Kashmir, in October 2011, Wamiq, a 21-year-old commerce student, was detained under the PSA for his "involvement in anti-social activities aimed at disturbing the public tranquility and peace in the city." A group of anonymous people built a website to generate awareness around Wamiq's case, which caught the attention of Amnesty International. Examples like this were important to young people like Nasir and Burhan, because they illustrate that there are alternative ways in which voices from Kashmir can be articulated in nonviolent ways and heard by large audiences.

"Can we pause for a moment? I want to think about the martyrs of 2010, but also those who disappeared." Nasir requested, "In some ways this is worse than death, because our families never know. They live with uncertainty and the inability to lay their loved one's soul to rest." We sat quietly together for a moment.

For Nasir and Burhan these cups of *nun chai* were therapeutic. They said it created space to reflect on what surrounds them every day – what they didn't have time to stop and think about in this same way. In their minds, revolution was real. Just as I was wondering when freedom would arrive, they told me that India had already lost, because Kashmir would never forget. For Nasir and Burhan the resilience of *azadi* was fueled by memory; memories that only became more definite, clear, and certain with the events of 2010.

There was much said, and due to the fact that words had consequences in Kashmir, much that was best left unwritten.

A poetic preservation of history

The ninety-eighth cup
5 July 2012

Down a back lane in the old city of Srinagar a small silver-haired poet named Zareef Ahmed “Zareef,” (Zareef means “the happy one”), welcomed us into his home. As he came to learn about Cups of nun chai, and also about an earlier work – Paper txt msgs from Kashmir – Zareef smiled and said there were always alternative ways out. He then served us *nun chai* with large pieces of pink Himalayan salt on the side. Zareef asked his grandson to show us a translated collection of his poems that had been compiled on Facebook. In Kashmiri he began to read *Tch'er T'e be'*, literally “the sparrow and me,” though translated into English as *The Sparrow's Sorrow*. Written toward the end of 2010, Uzma helped me follow the English translation, parts of which spoke so pertinently to what was also at the core of Cups of nun chai:

*If the tongue dithers and nothing is said,
People of tomorrow can't know our today.*

Zareef continued reading. Outside the window, in this secluded corner of the old city, birds skirted across the roof. *Tch'er T'e be'* was based on a conversation between Zareef and a sparrow. I imagined Zareef sitting here in his home, surrounded outside by the death and desecration of 2010, and suddenly turning to the visiting sparrows outside his window to make sense of it all.

Zareef spoke for more than two hours with us. His conversation was full of poetry and satirical criticisms of Kashmiri society at large. His charming wit enabled him to poke fun at almost everything, though there was also a heavier, more serious side to what he said. I remember the phrase *Taaran garee, taaran garee*. He repeated it again: *Taaran garee, taaran garee*. It was the title of a poem, and a Kashmiri phrase that referred to trickery, roguery, and deception. *Taaran garee, taaran garee*.

Zareef spoke about the idea of occupation. He spoke about what it has meant historically in Kashmir and what it means today, under what he described as Hindustan. And he spoke about what he does with his *qalam* – pen – in response to this occupation.

Zareef wanted to mark history with his *qalam*. Kashmir's history had always been distorted and controlled by others, and he stressed the importance of writing one's own story. Zareef wanted to capture his world in his words so that the future would know and understand what had happened. It was for these reasons that he wrote.

Zareef's ancestors had been experts in the craft of shawl-making. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, his family were forced into exile under Dogra rule and made to move from Kashmir all the way to Amritsar. Zareef said with a sense of pride that all of his ancestors had given something of themselves to the idea of *azadi*. Today he was writing in Kashmiri, using his *qalam* and analogies drawn

from the natural environment of Kashmir to mark history with a poetic description of the desecration of life that surrounded him.

The Chinar tree, called “Boe’n” in *Koshur*, the language of Kashmir, had special significance for Zareef. He not only wrote about the trees but also spent a lot of time planting them. The physical act of this small silver-haired poet planting a *boe’n* on the streets of Srinagar and in the rolling valleys of Kashmir, felt like a poem in itself. Zareef’s own ode to the *boe’n*, reads in part like this:

Dae’dwanan yawun yei yo ’ud thaevehaen hamsai Boe’n
These desolate ruins will come back to life, if as thy neighbour you cultivate
the Boe’n.

As we were leaving, Zareef led us into the corner of his back garden where he pointed to the fort atop the Hari Parbat hill that sat above his home. He said it had been an interrogation center, a place of torture. The Indian army sits in that old Afghan fort and peers down at the city through binoculars. I hope they catch sight of Zareef with his hands in the soil, lovingly planting a *boe’n*, and I hope their binoculars are able to see the power of his poetry in action.

Kashmir’s sense of self

The ninety-ninth cup
 6 July 2012

“2010 held great promise. But the heavy hand of the Indian state turned it all to nothing.” Those were Uncle’s first words when we sat together over two cups of *nun chai*. In his view, 2010 had not been significantly different to the last 20 years of conflict in Kashmir.

He was quiet for quite some time. Uncle is the kind of person who thinks carefully before speaking. Eventually he looked towards me, “Kashmir has a long history that goes back much further than India’s.” This was the basic premise that grounded our conversation. It unfolded like a personal tour through time, shedding insight on the mythological and modern political history of Kashmir. It was Uncle’s way of explaining to me why Kashmir was not India.

Uncle began with a story about King Solomon’s journey to Kashmir, at a time when the region was mostly underwater, thousands upon thousands of years ago. King Solomon, whom Uncle said Islam recognizes as the Prophet Suleiman, had flown to Kashmir and landed by what was now called the Hari Parbat Hill in Srinagar. According to popular mythology, the King and Prophet Suleiman aided the settlement of Kashmir by regulating the water in the region and encouraging it to flow smoothly along the Jhelum and out past Baramulla. Uncle also mentioned that at some point in Hindu mythology Brahma’s grandson visited Kashmir, but this was long, long ago.

Sitting at an important juncture on the historic silk-trade route, people from all over the world had come to settle in Kashmir: currents of migration that built the

syncretic Kashmiri identity Uncle was so proud of today. He spoke of the Nagas, and the Brahmas and the Jews from Egypt who migrated during the time of the Pharaohs. With a clear sense of certainty, Uncle told me that Kashmir was a very “multicultural” space.

As he spoke, sharing so many diverse and obscure pieces of information, I was amazed at how deeply this fluid, multilayered sense of history and mythology shaped Uncle’s sense of self. And it was this very clear sense of self that became Uncle’s way of articulating precisely how Kashmir was not India.

Uncle’s personal “tour” through time soon reached Kashmir’s modern era. For almost 100 years, from 1846, Kashmir’s struggle had been against Dogra rule; 1947 had been a turning point, and shortly after, Sheikh Abdullah became the first indigenous head of government that Kashmir had seen for centuries (although “Kashmir” itself was no longer whole). Driven by their own national interests the newly formed sibling nations of India and Pakistan divided and occupied Kashmir. Sheikh Abdullah was soon imprisoned by India, and during the tenure of his imprisonment, Uncle said, a number of important laws were changed. Two decades later, upon his release in the early 1970s Abdullah was relegated from Prime Minister to the position of Chief Minister of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. Uncle saw this as a major betrayal to the idea of Kashmir’s independence. It was a political compromise that Sheikh Abdullah, once touted as the Lion of Kashmir, would never live down.

Uncle told me about the rigged elections in the 1980s and the armed movement that emerged in response during the 1990s. He said today India had control of virtually all the water resources and powerhouses of Kashmir, along with a major portion of its richest agricultural land. “Just take a look around,” he said, “we are living under siege.” Uncle’s words were full and heavy with the knowledge that anything can happen. Here the food, water, and power are in the hands of an occupying force that does not agree with the views held by a majority of the people it occupies. In this town, for instance, the water supply is routinely cut during times of political upheaval in order to exert even more pressure on an already vulnerable civilian population. In 2010, the eruption of anger – the protests, this ability to face bullets with stones – was not at all isolated, but, as Uncle explained, it was deeply connected with what has been a centuries-long history of struggle in Kashmir.

“But today,” Uncle lamented, “things are so dire that we cannot even protest against the dogs that are biting people on the city’s streets. Politicians come here to defend animal rights but not the rights of humans.” He said that in one year more than 500 women died in a local hospital due to negligence and people were not allowed to protest. “This is no way to live. We are not living. We are simply dragging ourselves through this life.”

Uncle said with a sad sense of clarity that he did not see change in the near future. Kashmir is stuck in a cycle and he could not see how or when it would end. “There had been real hope in 2010, but Pakistan had remained silent.” Uncle felt Pakistan had not even supported Kashmir properly in their own media. “We have been betrayed on a number of fronts, and now Kashmir has nowhere to turn.”

Stories of their own

The one-hundred-and-fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth cups
17 June 2012

Over *nun chai*, Sobia, Ifrah, and Nazish – three young girls just 20 years of age – began recounting stories they had heard while growing up. At the insistence of her daughter, Nazish’s mother, Mehjabeen told me that after crossing back over from Pakistan her brother had been detained for two years in Delhi’s notorious Tihar Jail. With no word, his family had presumed he was dead, until one day he just returned home. And was thankfully still with them today. Later that evening I met Mehjabeen’s brother, now a slim, older man with a hopeful smile.

But as the girls spoke about “militants,” Nazish’s father Mohammad Ashraf interrupted and told them not to use the word militant, but to instead speak of Kashmir’s “freedom fighters.” “If Gandhi was India’s freedom fighter, why not ours also?” he asked them. The girls were a little embarrassed and soon recognized the deeper meanings embedded in their use of language. Nazish later remarked, with a cheeky smirk, that she wouldn’t make the same mistake again.

“So when did Australia become free from the British?” Ashraf asked me. I tried to explain, sadly, that we never really did. Today, the shape of Australia is a continuation of that foreign settlement – of stolen land, of the desecration of one civilization by another. Colonization runs deep; Aboriginal people in Australia are in many ways ostracized in their own country, and despite some political gains in recent decades, the situation is far from “free.” When I shared *nun chai* with Aboriginal people in Australia they inevitably related Kashmir’s story back to the wars and massacres and struggles against colonization that have shaped their country. Ashraf and the girls listened and thought about this carefully.

Through most of their lives the conflict in Kashmir had largely existed through stories that Sobia, Ifrah, and Nazish had overheard from their parents and older family members. But 2008 and 2010 had changed this. Those two years had given their generation, who were just small kids in the 1990s, stories of their own. The violence had now marked their memories.

In 2010 Sobia, Ifrah, and Nazish had been in their final year of high school. They spent four months at home under curfew and consequently missed half of the year’s curriculum. They spoke a lot about the experience of being “inside” for all these months; the fear, the death, the frustration, and the hopelessness burst out of them like hot fluid. But one thing they described, which I had never heard before, was something called a “deal.” A “deal” occurred when the armed forces decided to let people out of their homes to buy essentials for a restricted period of time. It came from the Hindustani word “dheel,” to loosen up. Soldiers would drive around a locality, telling its residents through a loudspeaker that a “deal” had been made. People would pour out of their homes to buy essentials, and when these 15 minutes of the “deal” were up, the voice on the loudspeaker would order everyone to return to their homes quickly. The lathi sticks used for crowd control would come out, and the curfew would resume. They were stuck inside, once again.

Against their mother's will, Sobia's younger brothers would sometimes join the protests outside on the streets. She would scold them, and order them to stay inside, but at only 15 and 11 years of age, they would argue back, asking their mother if she wanted her daughter to be the next Neelofar or Asiya – two young victims of a double rape and murder case in Shopian in 2009 that manifested in a major cover-up involving the government and armed forces.

Poignantly, Ifrah said we could sympathize with those who had lost their loved ones, but unless and until it happened to us we could never really know their pain. She explained that pain is something one lives with permanently; it is carried inside and ultimately changes the very definition of life.

Earlier that day, Nazish said she was never really interested in politics, but somehow Kashmir made politics unavoidable. She asked what I felt. It wasn't politicians or parliaments that interested me, but a deeper politics of life. Nazish understood exactly what I meant.

Silence as absence of peace

The one-hundred-and-eleventh cup
23 July 2012

Nida was washing dishes in the kitchen with her back to me when she asked, "Alana, do you think Kashmir will ever get freedom?" Before I could really answer, she said, "I don't believe we will. We are ourselves not an honest people."

This was the beginning of Nida's kitchen diatribe, flavored with disillusionment and honesty. Growing up in the maze-like by-lanes of Sopore, a place known for its strong anti-Indian sentiment, protest, and armed resistance, Nida had seen a lot. But it never seemed to end, and she had become skeptical about what all of it achieved.

Nida said her father wouldn't like her saying this, but she told me to look at Kashmir's leaders. She said they had one face to the public, with which they spoke of ideals, and behind closed doors they had another face they wore to make deals that were driven by self-interest and greed. She said Walter Lawrence – the colonial observer and much critiqued author of *The Valley of Kashmir* (1895) – was right to describe Kashmiri people as a dishonest lot. Nida asked, "How can we expect freedom until we free ourselves from the ills of our own society?"

Nida spoke with frustrated emotion, and I listened. Reflecting her own situation, she lamented, "In Kashmir, people are willing to raise their voices against India within the four walls of their home, but not beyond." Standing at the kitchen sink, Nida said Kashmir is lacking courage and clarity. "Ask a common stone-pelter on the street why they are throwing stones. They are boys simply following a trend." I asked her about the martyrs, how she made sense of the young boys who died on those streets, "They were all innocents. When the angels come for them, it is those boys who will be the first to ask, 'What did I die for?'"

Nida's voice was beautiful, yet also full of a fierce exasperation. Usually we spoke about love or our families and friends while we hung out in the kitchen, cooking together, laughing, and sharing recipes between Kashmir and Australia. But here the politics came out – confused, compressed, and human. Nida had grown up seeing dead bodies. “I saw Sopore burning. I saw bodies carried past my house to the martyrs’ graveyard. I’ve seen so many. Once I saw a head pass by without a body.” For Kashmir to be free she believed they needed 100 percent dedication from 100 percent of the people. But this never happened. “Look at who our martyrs are,” Nida deplored, “they are all from the middle and lower classes. Why do we die and not the rich?”

In 2009 the double rape and murder of two young women by security forces in Shopian brought about an immense 47-day strike led by the local citizen’s consultative committee *Majlis-e-Mashawarat*, with support coming from across the Valley. Nida felt frustrated that after 47 days it seemed people had forgotten. She asked:

What are we doing today to take care of all the women, young and old, raped by the army in Kunan-Poshpora, and the injustice of Neelofar and Asiya’s death in Shopian? If we really cared for others as we care for ourselves, we would never have given up.

She referred to the uprising of 2010 as *Ragda, Ragda*, a Kashmiri phrase, particularly popular in Sopore, which related to the act of removing stains from a piece of clothing and was used in this context to refer to removing or erasing the stains of India from Kashmir. Nida complained:

The *Ragda Ragda* came to an end because our stomachs were hungry. We ran out of rice and food and gas and we gave up, we said enough is enough – give us our rice, give us our food and give us our gas. Freedom can wait till next time.

Nida said other countries in the world attained freedom by sacrificing endlessly.

If we really want freedom, we have to leave everything Indian, just like India left everything that was British under Gandhi. But no. No one has the courage to leave their government jobs, or to go without sales, trade and supplies. We do want freedom. That is true. But we are also tired.

Nida herself had a government job that she could not leave; it was secure, but it wasn’t free. Her opinions reflected the contradictions and incongruence within herself and within her own society.

From Nida, as well as so many others, I kept hearing again and again how the struggle was exhausting. It was not that Nida did not want Kashmir to be free, but that she had lost hope in the possibility that Kashmir could be free. As our

nun chai in the kitchen came to an end, Nida added, “Today there is not peace in Kashmir, as the media likes to pretend. We do not live in peace but in silence.”

“The peoples’ will would always find a way”

The one-hundred-and-seventeenth and one-hundred-and-eighteenth cup
31 July 2012

“We played cricket together after our tenth-class exams. Tufail wasn’t a stone thrower. He was gentle. He was walking to his maternal home, carrying his school bag, and they shot at him.” Umar had been a classmate of Tufail. He spoke directly. Boys grow so much between the ages of 17 and 19. Sitting beside me, Umar was a man. It was hard to imagine him in the same class as Tufail, whose own boyhood had been frozen in time by the small passport-sized photograph that circulated in the media after his death.

Farooq, who seemed almost old enough to be Umar’s father, spoke about their work as caretakers of the Martyrs’ Graveyard in Srinagar, known in Urdu as the *Mazar-e-Shohada* and in Koshur as the *Shaheed Malguzar*. “It is our service both to the nation and to Islam. We are carrying forth a Sunnah. Our Prophet Mohamad used to deliver the burial rights for his companions too.” Farooq and Umar’s vocation brought them to a world in Kashmir where loss was at its most visible and pain was raw. This is their everyday. Umar buries his friends.

Farooq told me the *Mazar-e-Shohada* in Srinagar was formed just 22 years ago, when the armed conflict began in earnest. “It was the will of the people, and when people come together in their thousands,” he said, “there is little the government can do to oppose them.” This *Mazar-e-Shohada* was envisioned as a place where martyrs from all over Kashmir would be laid to rest. But once the government recognized the historic importance this place would engender, every effort was made to thwart that process of memorialization. Each martyr’s grave is a piece of historical evidence – ever accumulating as the conflict continues – that the state does not want around.

It is estimated that 70,000 people have died in the last two decades, although only around 1,000 have been laid to rest in graves here. Due to the violent repression the government has employed over the past two decades, it is no longer just Srinagar, but every town across Kashmir now has a *Shaheed Malguzar* of their own. As Farooq said, the peoples’ will would always find a way. But before the 1990s, Kashmir did not have the culture of maintaining martyrs’ graveyards as it does today. Historically, there are the martyrs of 13 July 1931 who rose against Dogra rule, but for Farooq this was something very different. “It was only in the 1990s, when death and struggle became a part of Kashmir, that the *Mazar-e-Shohada* became a part of us.”

Both Farooq and Umar spoke of how the armed forces would cordon off the area around the graveyard with barbed concertina wire – especially during the uprising of 2010. They would beat people who had come to bury their loved ones. They would refuse them entry to the graveyard. The armed forces would fire on

people at funerals. As a result, in the process of attempting to bury the dead, more people would die. Farooq and Umar told me that now many burials take place in the dark of night, without a proper funeral service at all.

Another young man suddenly joined the conversation.

We are disconnected today from the repression that is still taking place around us. We feel things are fine, as if peace is in the air, but in reality, boys are taken away in the night and we have no idea in what condition they are detained.

“Confrontation and violence won’t achieve anything,” Farooq interrupted, “conversation is what we need.” The young men remained silent, but didn’t seem convinced.

Umar took us to the grave of his friend Tufail. Then he took us to the grave of another friend who also died in 2010. “In three days, it will be the second anniversary of his death.” Umar’s friend was named Aanas Khursheed. Like Tufail, he was also 17 years old when he died. But Aanas was known as a fierce stone-pelter. Apparently, he had been under the watch of the authorities for some time. On 3 August 2010, Aanas decided to throw stones at a vehicle of the Central Reserve Police Force that was stationed in his locality. There was nothing happening on the streets that day, so no one expected much response. But a senior officer signaled for one of his men to take aim. Aanas received a bullet in the abdomen. The CRPF then placed a heavy drainage pipe over his bleeding body and left him there. For hours they refused to let anyone recover his injured body. Finally, Aanas was taken to hospital, where he was declared dead on arrival.

Imagine the mix of fury and desperation that pushes a young boy to throw a stone at a man with a gun – and the legal immunity to kill him. Now imagine what he must have felt as he lay there knowing that he had been shot.

4 The state of *Azadi*

Voices from Pakistan-administered Kashmir

Anam Zakaria

The status of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir stands increasingly complicated seventy-three years after the Partition of 1947. Claimed by both India and Pakistan, with parts of the region under Chinese control, Jammu and Kashmir is a heavily contested territory. The Kashmir Valley in particular has become a flash-point over the decades, with an open and armed resistance against the Indian state underway since the 1980s. Several young Kashmiris turned toward the gun, and more recently to stones, to fight a regime that they have experienced as oppressive and violent,¹ a regime that for many Kashmiris stands illegitimate. Ever since Partition, two strong but distinct movements have emerged from the region: one that seeks a merger with Pakistan and the other that wants a return to its pre-Partition status, a united and independent state. However, today both of these movements stand unrealized, with parts of the state of Jammu and Kashmir – with Ladakh carved into a separate union territory after the events of 5 August 2019 – scattered across the Line of Control (LoC), the *de facto* border, which separates Indian-administered Kashmir from Pakistan-administered Kashmir. While in most parts the Valley, Jammu and Ladakh remain firmly in India's control, even more so after the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019 (this territory is referred to as Jammu and Kashmir in India and Indian-occupied or *makbooza* Kashmir in Pakistan), Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Kashmir (referred to as Pakistan-administered Kashmir in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in India) have been administered by Pakistan since the late 1940s.

Over the years, several journalists, activists, human rights institutions and civil society organizations in Kashmir, Pakistan and India have turned the gaze on the region. At different points during the seven-decade-long dispute, Kashmir has also come under international spotlight. However, this reportage has largely remained confined to the events in the Valley in Indian-administered Kashmir. Other parts of the state have received little attention. Partly, this is because the conflict between civilians and the state apparatus in the Valley has turned only bloodier overtime; the growing human rights violations and the repeated cycles of violence have demanded focus and attention.² However, this is partially also because it is often assumed that it is only the Muslim-majority Valley, which remains most perplexed and preoccupied with its future status, i.e. merger with Pakistan, independence or a more autonomous and egalitarian relationship with India. Using religion

as a marker of affiliation in a post-Partition landscape, it has been hypothesized that the Hindu and Buddhist presence in Jammu and Ladakh would necessitate its inevitable merger with India while the Muslim populated Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan have and will always opt for the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

These neat binaries, however, obfuscate a far more complex reality. They assume that the other parts of the state, be it Ladakh, Jammu, Gilgit-Baltistan or Azad Kashmir, have a monolithic identity and uniform politics. They also assume that Kashmiri identity is limited to its ethnic and linguistic roots in the Valley. The people of Jammu, Ladakh, Gilgit-Baltistan or Azad Kashmir are then not Kashmiri in their true essence. After all, Kashmiris as an ethnic and linguistic group are mainly dominant in the Valley. If the other parts of the state constitute groups other than Kashmiris, then perhaps these territories also lie outside or on the periphery of the Kashmir conflict. In the process, it becomes easy to dismiss or sideline them in discussions on Jammu and Kashmir's present and future.

A closer look, however, reveals that not only has a strong political identity taken birth in the region over time, with diverse ethnic and linguistic groups like those that speak Pahari, Shina or Gojari, affiliating with the Kashmiri cause for independence, but also that many parts of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir remain significantly entangled with the larger conflict. This essay will particularly focus on the territory known as Azad [translated as free] Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) or Azad Kashmir, which has been an important stakeholder and a long-standing affectee of the Kashmir dispute.

Before going further, it should be noted that the emphasis on local grievances and politics of AJK in this essay is in no way meant to undermine the repression and brutality encountered by Kashmiris in Indian-administered Kashmir. For too long, Kashmiri lives have been crushed and brutalized in a tit-for-tat battle between India and Pakistan. Comparisons and juxtapositions which seek to maximize issues on the other side only to minimize grave injustices on one's own side are not only problematic but also dangerous. By highlighting the state of affairs and the aspirations of people living in Azad Kashmir, this essay seeks to bring AJK into the fold of conversations on the future of Jammu and Kashmir. The region deserves attention without in any way dismissing the everyday violence endured by Kashmiris in the Valley. The oral histories and narratives documented here hope to contribute to a better understanding of how the other regions of Jammu and Kashmir are shaped by the conflict. This essay and these narratives must be read in light of the state of affairs in Indian-administered Kashmir, which require immediate attention and resolution.

According to the UN resolutions, 'Azad Kashmir is neither a sovereign state nor a province of Pakistan, but rather a "local authority" with responsibility over the area assigned to it under a 1949 ceasefire agreement with India'.³ Spread over 13,297 square kilometers, many parts of AJK touch the LoC, with Indian-administered Kashmir located only meters away. While the Indian State claims that the whole state of Jammu and Kashmir is an integral part of its territory, arguing that Maharaja Hari Singh – the Hindu Dogra ruler of Jammu and Kashmir at the time of Partition – had sealed the fate of the state by acceding to India in

October 1947, Pakistan has repeatedly insisted that the Maharaja had acted under duress⁴ and only a plebiscite can ascertain the true wishes of the residents of the state. Since 1947, Pakistan has made several attempts to claim all of Jammu and Kashmir. In the immediate aftermath of Partition, Pukhtoons from Pakistan's tribal areas, allegedly backed by the state, entered Kashmir in hopes of securing and integrating the region with Pakistan. In 1965, Operation Gibraltar was launched to spark an internal uprising in Indian-administered Kashmir.⁵ And in 1999, the Pakistan Army instigated the Kargil dispute⁶ under General Pervez Musharraf, the then Chief of Army Staff, to once again try to win Kashmir. It is pertinent to mention that while these actions have been orchestrated or backed by Pakistan, the calls for *azadi* in Indian-administered Kashmir are not a result of such operations. Though labeled as 'Pakistan-sponsored terrorism' there has long been an indigenous struggle for independence in the region. From as early on as 1947, local Kashmiris have led uprisings and built the momentum for separation.⁷ The struggle for independence is shaped by their own grievances, first with the Maharaja and then with the Indian state. While the separatist movement is indeed supported by Pakistan, to overlook events such as the Jammu Massacre⁸ – in which thousands of Muslims were killed – the ongoing human rights violations by the Indian state, the discrimination and use of force against Kashmiris and the more recent efforts to change the demography of Kashmir⁹ would be a grave oversight. It is these factors that have shaped the indigenous struggle and pushed some Kashmiris to look toward Pakistan for support. While Pakistan's own motivations for interference in and backing of the independence struggle can be critically analyzed – and some Kashmiris argue that by meddling in their affairs, Pakistan has linked a legitimate freedom struggle with terrorism and cost them their *azadi*¹⁰ – to cast the entire movement as Pakistan sponsored and ignore local voices and struggles is a gross misreading of the situation.

Nevertheless, when Pakistan has engaged in Kashmir, it is the Azad Kashmir territory (and that of Gilgit-Baltistan, in the case of Kargil) which played an important role as a launch pad for Pakistan's policies. Muzaffarabad, Bhimber, Kotli, i.e. cities and towns that constitute part of the Kashmir Valley and Jammu Province that fall in Pakistan-administered Kashmir or Azad Kashmir, have been used to make entry and set off offensives in Indian-administered territory. This political, diplomatic and military support to the Kashmir cause, largely understood as separation from India, has been a cornerstone of Pakistan's Kashmir and India policy. In the 1980s and 1990s, these policies would not only begin to alter the social fabric and political landscape of Indian-administered Kashmir – where the indigenous struggle became tainted as Pakistan-sponsored terrorism – but also pull Azad Kashmir firmly into direct conflict, with no end in sight even decades later. Ever since, the ongoing Kashmir conflict and the direct repercussions faced by Azad Kashmiris – cross-border shelling, mortar shots and blasts – have turned *azadi* (freedom) in the state of Azad Kashmir into an oxymoron.

In 1987 Kashmiris in Indian-administered Kashmir had turned up to cast their vote, in hopes of electing an empowered and representative government to further Kashmiri interests. However, the widely acknowledged rigging of these elections¹¹

served a massive blow to the Kashmiri youth, who had hoped for change, greater rights and opportunities. Agitation and restlessness engulfed the Valley. On the other side of the divide, the Pakistani state stood victorious after defeating the Soviet forces in Afghanistan. As frustration and despair in Indian-administered Kashmir intensified after the elections, some of these disenfranchised Kashmiris began to turn to Pakistan for support, in a desperate attempt to reclaim freedom and ownership in their own homeland. The LoC, then largely porous and penetrable, became a crossover point. Young boys made their way into Azad Kashmir, in the hopes of receiving arms training to go back and fight the Indian state. In my interviews with Kashmiris, I would speak to boys who had crossed over at tender ages of sixteen and seventeen. They had come to fight *Jihad* – a holy war. One of the men, recalled:

We had no idea what Pakistan had, what people did in Pakistan, what jihad was but everyone wanted to go across. We all wanted to get arms training and come back and fight. My friends and I decided to go too . . . we left for school one morning but crossed over and went to a Hizbul Mujahideen (a militant outfit operating in Kashmir) camp instead.¹²

The current prime minister of Azad Kashmir, Raja Farooq Haider, recently claimed that as many as 40,000 refugees had crossed over from Indian-administered Kashmir since 1989,¹³ the year the armed uprising against the Indian state escalated.¹⁴ While several of these refugees came to Azad Kashmir and Pakistan for arms training, i.e. to become *mujahids* (holy warriors), others came to seek respite from the brutal crackdowns that the Indian state resorted to in order to curb the armed struggle. Both of these causes for the *hijrat* (migration), the escape and the desire to pick up arms, hold spiritual meaning for the refugee community. In an interview with a refugee family in a camp in Muzaffarabad, two young boys explained that though they had never picked up arms they considered themselves as both *mohajirs* (migrants, which includes the refugee community settled in Azad Kashmir) and *mujahid* (holy warriors). Referring to Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Madina and the religious wars he had fought, they explained that just as the Messenger of Islam was a *mohajir* and a *mujahid*, they too adorned both identities. 'It is an honour for us to be both, *mohajirs* and *mujahid*. We don't have to pick up arms for it; it is part and parcel of our identity. We are privileged to walk in the footsteps of the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him)'.

Of course, many *mohajirs* also see it as essential to be *mujahids* for they feel that it is the only way to reclaim the land and the life they had left behind. Divided from their families, unable to touch the soil that gave them birth and struggling on the fringes of society without a stable source of livelihood, the refugees still dream of 'going back'. Many of them haven't seen their mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters for decades. Before the age of social media and Internet connectivity, even speaking to each other was an anomaly. Phone calls from Azad Kashmir to Indian-administered Kashmir are barred. Some of the refugees confided that they had only spoken to their families for the first time years after migrating. Those

“‘back home’” had already imagined them dead. This longing to reconnect has only grown over the years, particularly with new age technologies and communication channels like Skype, Facebook and Twitter. As photographs and news pour in from the other side of the LoC, often marred with stories of violence and bloodshed, the feeling of helplessness and desperation consumes the cramped camps. As one member of a divided family stated:

Now that we are in touch with our relatives on the other side, the nature of conflict has changed altogether. Now it's not just about our lives, we are equally concerned about them on the other side. One can say that . . . [it has] improved our relationships but has also made us more conscious about the lives on the other side.¹⁵

In face of this isolation and frustration, some refugees have seen militancy as a way to reclaim all they have lost. As Cabeiri Robinson, who has conducted extensive work with refugee families in Azad Kashmir, explains in her book, *Body of Victim, Body of Warrior*, ‘In the 1990s . . . Kashmiri refugees talked about the importance of becoming *mujahids* (warriors) and participating in a *jiḥād* (armed struggle) as a way to defend their families to make it possible to return to their homes’.¹⁶ The refugee camps, where thousands of divided families continue to dwell, then serve not only as a source of shelter and protection but can also serve as potential spaces for ‘organizing militant violence’¹⁷ in the hopes that it will help secure *azadi* for *makboozā* (occupied) Indian-Kashmir and enable a return to a home lost. This *jiḥād* is not motivated by a desire to protect Muslim territorial sovereignty but is rather seen as a way to ‘defend Kashmiri people from human rights abuses by the state.’¹⁸

The following is an interview excerpt of a man who had crossed over at the age of 16 in 1996, in the hopes of going back to his home one day as a ‘liberator’. Now, as a 36-year old, he remains stranded on this side of the LoC, working as a medical assistant in a local hospital. In a report published on divided families by the Center for Peace, Development and Reforms, an NGO working to promote cross-LoC linkages and political empowerment of AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan, he shared that though he had crossed back many times, being ‘involved in encounters near [his] home on the other side (in Srinagar) . . . roaming around [his] home at night and watching [his] parents from a distance’ he could never go and meet them in fear that they would be under surveillance and his visit could trigger a backlash on part of the Indian state. It was only in 2016, 20 years after he had left, that he was able to reunite with his family when they visited Azad Kashmir through the cross-LoC bus initiated after the 2003 ceasefire.

Just like old times, my mother scolded me and twisted my ears for not being properly dressed up. I felt that she didn't like my ‘new’ name [that he had to take on after joining the militant movement] but she said nothing about it, the look on her face made me realize that like others, my mother has also understood that for people with ‘contested identities’, names don't matter.¹⁹

Others who have crossed over have only met worse fates. Kashmiri journalist, Jalaluddin Mughal, a resident of Neelum Valley, shares that as a child he would often notice three graves on the roadside on his way to school. Unlike other graves, which were showered with petals in remembrance of loved ones on special occasions like Eid, these graves remained barren and neglected. No one ever visited them. It was only later that he discovered that these graves held bodies of those who had been killed while crossing over. They had no family members, no relatives to attend to them. Lying on this side of the LoC, they remain parted from their families and homes even in death.

There are approximately 24 refugee camps being run by the government, housing 22,773 people.²⁰ Several other refugee families live in small homes, outside of the camps. A visit to one of the largest camps, the Manakpayan camp in Muzaffarabad, reveals a dire state of affairs. The main road to the camp was destroyed in the 2005 earthquake that devastated Kashmir. During a visit in 2015, I was told that a small chairlift – that hangs above the Jhelum River – is commonly used by residents to connect to the city. During emergencies, for instance, when women are in labor, men have to carry them to the chairlift before they can be transported to the other side. Bare from one end, the chairlift also poses a threat to children who could topple over, plunging into the river beneath. At the footsteps of the camp, one notices dozens of makeshift shelters. Made out of mud, brick, cloth or corrugated iron, these shanty homes give refuge to thousands who had made their way to Azad Kashmir in the hopes that they would return within a few months or at most a few years. A common sentiment expressed by each refugee I came across in the camp was that they had thought ‘azadi’ would come to their Kashmir within one to two years at most. The fact that they are still living in these dwellings, even three decades later, has made them ‘the living dead’, a term used by a fellow Kashmiri to describe their state. Stuck in limbo, neither here nor there, these are the nowhere people,²¹ the people who have suffered torture and oppression in Indian-administered Kashmir, only to meet a dire fate on this side of the LoC.

Some of the refugees narrate harrowing details of the persecution²² they experienced before leaving their homes in Indian-administered Kashmir.²³ Genital shocks, peeling of skin, hanging of persons upside down and long, harsh beatings are etched in their memories. One man had narrated how he had been electrocuted, how he was made to stand under cold water for hours with his hands up in the air. If he ever tired of holding up his hands, the forces would beat him. Many times, the torture stories were personal while at other times they described what had happened to those in and around them. One man told me of how forces tortured his cousin ‘taking out both his eyes and cutting off both his legs’ while a woman shared how her husband had returned home with all the flesh peeled off from his arms and legs, with spices rubbed over his raw skin.

As I sat with them in the camp, some of the refugees showed me their wounds and scars which told stories that words could not describe. Yet others wanted to hide them in hopes of forgetting those years and ‘moving on’. However,

the high prevalence of depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder among the refugee community observed by mental health practitioners (and communicated to me in an interview with a Muzaffarabad-based psychologist who preferred not to be named) reveals that the wounds are still raw, the painful memories still alive, the persecution still ongoing. As one of the men in the camp explained:

So many people are psychologically impaired here. Children who were born in the camps have no place to play, to go out. They are getting badly affected. And then there are so many people who came from that side and cannot forget what they have seen. There is this one Muslim man who left the Indian police and crossed over. He just stands on the street and keeps saluting people. 150 Muslims left the police and came to Azad Kashmir. They couldn't bear seeing the torture. They left thinking they will get azadi but in the process many of them have lost their minds.

Another young boy in the camp told me:

I was 8 when I came here. They (the Indian forces) would interrogate me because my father was a *mujahid*. I have seen a lot with my own eyes. Once they beat up a boy terribly from our village . . . he was dying of thirst but they made him lie down next to a *chasma* (spring) and wouldn't give him water. I have also seen how the Indian army would call people, including women and ask them to dance and then they would shoot them . . . I saw this with my own eyes.

These memories are difficult to wash away and the fact that several refugees have also been mistreated in Azad Kashmir only perpetuates the sense of insecurity and exploitation. Reportedly, Pakistani state forces discriminate against the refugees on two accounts. First, since they have arrived from 'Indian occupied' or '*makbooza*' Kashmir – common terminology in Pakistan and Azad Kashmir to refer to Indian-administered Kashmir – they are viewed suspiciously and at times, are accused of working for Indian interests, furthering Indian agendas. Second, since many refugees aspire for an independent Kashmir rather than a merger with Pakistan, their secular political ideology is seen as a threat to Pakistan's claim over Kashmir. As a result, refugees can become political targets.

After the 2005 earthquake, when international donors and organizations were allowed into Azad Kashmir for relief work, it was one of the first times that Azad Kashmir came under international scrutiny. Closed off to the world, particularly due to years of cross-LoC shelling, Azad Kashmir was a secluded and isolated territory that not many knew much about. Poor communication channels and weak infrastructure meant that little news escaped from the region. The post-earthquake humanitarian efforts, however, brought Azad Kashmir to the forefront as one of the worse affected areas. It is estimated that close to 75,000 people died in the earthquake, mostly in cities and villages situated in Azad Kashmir.²⁴ It was then

that The Human Rights Watch documented the state of affairs of the region. With a particular focus on the conditions of the refugees, the report reasoned that:

A primary motive for the discrimination [against refugees] . . . would appear to be that many of them do not share the vision of a unified Kashmir under Pakistani control. Some have experienced abuse including arbitrary arrest and ill-treatment for seeking to exercise their rights.²⁵

Refugees have complained of beatings, harassment and persecution.²⁶ Further, most of them are also living without basic facilities such as heating, piped water, sewerage and proper sanitation. The government hands out Rs. 2,000 as stipend to them every month,²⁷ which is barely able to cover their expenses. While they are supposed to be issued Pakistani ID cards, essential to obtain basic public and private services, such as registration at schools, opening bank accounts, acquiring mobile phone sim cards and getting jobs, many of them are still not registered with NADRA (National Database & Registration Authority). This means that they are unable to find employment, vote or avail other basic facilities.

The icy-cold shelters, however, are the only home for most refugees. Those who have tried to cross back into Indian-administered Kashmir have faced further discrimination. Accused on the other side of being Pakistani traitors and of having militant links, the refugees often have to face brutal interrogations and are deprived of basic necessities in Indian-administered Kashmir too. A Srinagar-based journalist, Mohammad Mukaram, who has interviewed over a hundred people who returned under a rehabilitation policy²⁸ introduced by India to encourage former militants to return to their homes, told me that the policy has been a failure. When the refugees return, they are ostracized and are denied basic rights such as availing ration cards or enrolling their children in schools. Unable to integrate in society, they remain on the fringes, neither here nor there, still the nowhere people. Hearing these stories, most refugees know that they will live under constant surveillance if they do cross over,²⁹ and hence many of them are resigned to live in these camps until a lasting solution is found. The experiences of those who have returned act as a deterrent to crossing over.³⁰

However, the refugees who remain in Azad Kashmir find it no easier to integrate in society. The militant label is tough to shrug off whether in Indian- or Pakistan-administered Kashmir. Given that many refugees (including those who live outside of the camps) initially crossed over to take up arms or later joined militant organizations in the hopes of achieving liberation from Indian rule and reuniting with their families, locals sometimes assume that all *mohajirs* are *mujahids*. While this connection holds a spiritual and positive connotation for the refugee community, for the locals, militants have become a bane of their existence. Over the years, local support for militancy has begun to dissipate and increasingly, residents have begun to hold militants – oft perceived synonymous with refugees – as responsible for their state of affairs. This transition has been gradual but powerful.

In the initial years, during the early 1990s, villagers living by the LoC tell me that they had opened their doors to refugees, hosting and feeding them,

empathizing and consoling them, giving them the courage to continue their fight for *azadi*. They had heard about the oppression on the other side and wanted to help their Kashmiri brothers and sisters. However, when some of the boys began to return to Indian-administered Kashmir, armed and ready to fight the Indian state, the open resistance soon began to hold bloody consequences for them. The Indian security forces resorted to suppress the civilian uprising by force, targeting not only the militants but also the camps where they had been nurtured. Azad Kashmir, where these trainings were perceived to take place, became a target. From the early 1990s onwards, the Indian army began to shell indiscriminately, bombarding villages and homes resting by the mountains and rivers that separate the two antagonistic parts of Kashmir. The Pakistani state also resorted to shelling. Ordinary villagers, some of whom had opened their homes to the families from the 'other' side, and who straddle in between Indian and Pakistani army pickets, became the causality. In Neelum Valley alone (which begins at the Chela Bandi Bridge, north of Muzaffarabad, and extends for more than 200 kilometers)³¹ it is estimated that 2,500–3,000 civilians were killed due to shelling incidents during the 1990s.³²

As one journeys through the LoC in Azad Kashmir, crossing towns and villages like Athmuqam, Keran, Sharda and Shahkot (located in Neelum Valley, where most of the villages are situated right by the LoC), locals narrate chilling details of an approximately 14-year long war that few people in Pakistan or India know about. The more affluent homes in these areas come accompanied with their own bunkers, built to give temporary respite to the villagers as cross-LoC shelling rocked their region. It is the same bunkers, some renovated while others in debilitating states, that continue to give shelter to the residents of the 'border' areas when the conflict gets activated. Living perilously close to the LoC, these homes come under the direct eye of the Indian forces. The 1990s, I am told, was a decade of darkness. The slightest sound, the slightest movement could invite fire. Scrambling to the bunkers, many young Kashmiris were born and raised inside these cramped spaces. Schools were shut down and illiteracy became a constant companion, resulting in a whole generation of uneducated Kashmiris. Some of them later turned toward militancy, their only hope to earn bread and butter. The following interview excerpts tell the stories in the words of the survivors:

There is a whole generation of uneducated boys and girls in our area. Schools were destroyed due to shelling, livelihood was ruined, our animals killed, our fields burnt . . . there was no concept of health or hygiene in the 1990s. Many women died during pregnancy. The shelling was continuous on some days . . . the men were often settled in the big cities for work but women and children were left cramped inside the bunkers, without any food or water. Once, some women were trapped inside for seven days . . . due to the firing, they couldn't step out. The children were famished, the mothers' breast empty. The milk had dried up. When they couldn't hear the wails of the children any longer, they cut their legs and had the children suck the blood to keep them hydrated, to keep them alive.

Come talk to anyone from our area in Azad Kashmir and they will tell you horror stories. We live right across the LoC, right in between Indian and Pakistani army posts. There has been a constant war here . . . once they (the Indian Army) fired on a hospital. There were eight or nine women there, in labour . . . another time, they fired near a Boys High School. The mortar hit the students and teachers and killed many of them. One of the teachers who survived had to have her leg amputated . . . we told her she had sacrificed for Kashmir . . . we told her to be brave but how long can we carry on like this . . . how long will this war last?

While interviewing another roadside shopkeeper about his memories of the firing, he remarked:

In the 1990s, you couldn't imagine standing on the road as you are right now . . . you couldn't even light a cigarette at night. It had to be pitch dark or *they* would see us and fire. Us children would hide on our rooftops and watch with amusement. It was an everyday reality for us.

Later, as I hiked through the beautiful mountain ranges, I noticed several passersby with physical or emotional disabilities. When I inquired, a local teashop owner emphatically responded, 'Yes, it's probably because of what they have seen. Can you imagine growing up hearing loud firing, hour by hour? What would that do to you?'

The support for the armed struggle against the Indian state began to wane as locals had to face heavy shelling and bombardment. After 2001, when Pakistan became an ally in the War on Terror in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks on the Twin Towers, several militant groups were dismantled and militancy began to be curbed. By this time, locals had also begun to protest against militancy, demanding that the Pakistan Army cracks down on infiltration so that peace can return to their area. Women in particular came out in the streets in dozens, putting pressure on forces.³³

In 2003, when India and Pakistan finally agreed upon a ceasefire across the international border, the working boundary (in the Sialkot, Jammu area. The term indicates that while on one side there is the internationally recognized border of Punjab, on the other side lies Jammu, a territory contested by both India and Pakistan) and the LoC, many of these residents breathed a sigh of relief. And for several years, respite did come to many of these villages and towns. The Neelum Valley in particular was relatively peaceful between 2003 and 2016 when the recent spate of violence in Indian-administered Kashmir after the killing of Burhan Wani, the commander of the militant outfit, Hizbul Mujahideen, spilled over and tensions between India and Pakistan escalated. As India accused Pakistan once more of sponsoring cross-border terrorism and blamed it for attacks in India (Pathankot Air Base attack in January 2016) and Indian-administered Kashmir (Uri attack which resulted in the death of eighteen soldiers in September 2016),³⁴ and claimed to have carried out surgical strikes in Pakistan to target terror launch pads, Neelum

Valley came under fire, with ceasefire violations, injuries and death bloodying the Valley once again. Bunkers were hastily renovated and those families that could afford to move, rushed to cities like Muzaffarabad, suffering exorbitant rent prices and cramped one- to two-room allocations, as the city was unable to cope with the mounting demand for refuge. The situation has only exacerbated in light of recent tensions between India and Pakistan in 2019–2020.

However, for other parts of the LoC, this wave of shelling is nothing new. Despite the 2003 ceasefire, firing continued in sectors of Azad Kashmir such as Kotli District (previously part of Mirpur District). Injuries and fatalities remain common, livelihood destroyed, schools shut down and hospitals ill-equipped to deal with the all-too frequent life-threatening wounds. As one visits these cities and villages, splinters and mortar shells, punctured walls and partially destroyed homes are easily visible. Many of the residents remain displaced, running away as soon as they hear the first burst of fire. These ongoing ceasefire violations mean that these Azad Kashmiris continue to live in a state of perpetual uncertainty and fear. They explain that at all times they have to be prepared to rush to the bunkers; they know the firing can begin without notice. Sandwiched in between Indian and Pakistani pickets, the two states view them as “collateral damage” of cross-LoC hostilities, but they are perhaps one of the worst victims of the ongoing Kashmir conflict.

As one woman explained:

The firing is even worse than an earthquake. At least after an earthquake, we can ask each other if everyone is okay; we can find out who is alive and who is dead. In firing, if a person is lying dead right in front of us we can't come out of the bunkers. There is no one to cover his or her face, to read the *kalma*. The LoC is very close. They (the Indian pickets) are higher so they can look down and see our children, our families. They know everything that is happening. Often we hear that a mortar has hit another person's house but we don't go to the house that had been fired at because the minute a couple of people gather they fire again . . . we are even too scared to go and offer our condolences.

The bombardment of their homes and the constant upheaval in their lives is too much to bear for these locals, particularly women and children who are often at home. They want the firing to stop at all costs, they want peace to return to their lives. Since they hold infiltration responsible for the firing, and since, like the refugees, they equate the *muhajireen* (migrants) with the *mujahid*, over the years a strained and bitter relationship has developed between the locals and the refugee/migrant community. As a Kashmiri journalist explained:

There is a tension in the very agenda of the locals and the refugees. While the locals are comfortable with the status quo, meaning that they are okay even if Azad Kashmir and Makbooza Kashmir are not united as their lives and families are on this side, the refugees have too much at stake across the

border. They want to continue struggling for azadi, to continue fighting to reunite with their families. While militancy isn't as visible in Azad Kashmir today, many young refugee boys had come here to fight for their freedom. They have affiliations with militant organizations. The locals feel that it is because of militant penetration that Indians kill civilians and so they don't want to support militancy any longer. However, the refugees cannot forget about their struggle and simply go back. Many of them are young, energetic and ready to fight. They want the Jihad to continue.

While it must be noted that not all those who crossed over from Indian-administered Kashmir after 1989 wanted to pick up arms and that certainly, not everyone in the refugee camps desires to join militant groups – many of them are women and men who simply wanted to escape the bloodshed on the other side. Others are children, born in these camps or outside, long after their parents had to flee their home – the jihadist aspirations seen to be associated with refugees make the locals resentful. They say:

We didn't know what these refugees were going to do when they first came here. We felt bad for them, we felt awful that they were being persecuted against, that they were fleeing Indian torture. We didn't know that they would go back to *that* Kashmir as militants and we would have to suffer the consequences. That we would lose our homes, our children, our livelihood.

Some of them feel that the militants are benefiting, filling up their pockets, profiteering from the conflict while the locals, particularly those who live by the LoC, have to suffer. In reality, while some militant commanders indeed live affluent lives, most refugees continue to survive in suffocating, cramped dwellings. However, for the women and men suffering shelling, these refugees are perceived as a significant cause of their ongoing misery. One of them commented, 'Tell them to keep that Kashmir to themselves. Those who have provoked the war live in peace while we live in war. We are not hungry for Kashmir. There is no *azad* Kashmir'. Another complained:

We have suffered due to the *mujahideen*. They infiltrate the LoC and the Indian Army fires on us. We have to leave our villages and become refugees in our own homeland. Our generations are being ruined. We just want peace. If this jihad has to continue, then the government should at least ensure that our basic needs are met. We spend our entire days in bunkers and when we get out, we cannot buy anything. Prices are so high; food items unaffordable. We are even unable to bury our martyrs because we are always scared that firing will resume. What kind of azadi is this?

Other interviewees protested that though militancy has largely been curbed, the Indian state continues to shell on them, showing no leniency even as infiltration has drastically reduced. Rather than giving them respite, the indigenous struggle

in the Valley is portrayed to be sponsored by state and non-state actors in Pakistan and AJK, with Kashmiris on the LoC having to face the brunt of ceasefire violations.

These tensions between the locals and the refugees are only one expression of the contested histories and politics of the region. Within the local community and within the refugees too, there are varying politics and aspirations regarding the future of Jammu and Kashmir. It is alleged that Pakistan had first supported the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) – a political organization formerly involved in militancy to seek independence from India and also Pakistan – but by the early 1990s had begun to realize that the organization had secular demands and envisioned an independent Jammu and Kashmir, separate from both India and Pakistan. Bent upon Kashmir's merger with Pakistan, the state has discarded JKLF for outfits centered around Islamic ideology. It was believed that by aligning the independence movement with Islamic principles, the Kashmir struggle would translate into a quest to join the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Groups like Hizbul Mujahidden and later the likes of Lakshar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad, whose leadership came not from Kashmir but rather from Punjab in Pakistan, began to gain ground in Azad Kashmir. Observing the despair and despondency in refugee camps, some Kashmiris say that these 'Islamist' organizations have tried to garner support there. It is certainly also in Pakistan's interest to have these new generations of refugees distance themselves from the secular ideology espoused by their parents and to understand 'azadi' in terms of the Muslim-majority Kashmir fighting 'infidel' 'Hindu' forces to join the Muslim-majority Pakistan, even if just on the basis of religion. Therefore, today one can find different narratives and ideologies within the refugee community too, with some refugees aspiring for an independent Kashmir, some wanting to side with Pakistan and yet others desperate to just return home and end this decades-long war.

Similarly, even among the locals, there are different stakeholders, each with their own vision for the future of Kashmir. Many of them simply want peace and do not necessarily want to challenge the status quo. In fact, increasingly their belief in *azadi* is beginning to dissolve, with more and more Kashmiris (and Pakistanis) believing that independence from Indian rule is unachievable in their lifetime. A study conducted by Gallup Pakistan in 1990 reveals that while only 5 percent of the respondents had felt that Kashmir would not gain independence, the number of such respondents increased to over 24 percent when Gallup Pakistan repeated its study in 2015.³⁵ Some Kashmiris believe that the four-point formula suggested by General Pervez Musharraf, the former president of Pakistan, is the only way forward. The formula proposes to make the current LoC irrelevant, allowing Kashmiris to travel to and forth under a joint supervision mechanism. Yet, others see the formula and the status quo in complete violation of Kashmiri wishes. They assert that only a plebiscite and the process of self-determination can decide Kashmir's fate. Furthermore, many of them continue to fight for an independent Kashmir, even in the heart of Azad Kashmir, which is popularly perceived to want a formal merger with Pakistan.

While the nationalist sentiment has not gained as much ground in Azad Kashmir as in the Valley, several nationalist parties continue to make a significant dent in Azad Kashmiri politics. These nationalists view Pakistan as an occupying force and believe that India, Pakistan – and China, which controls a part of Jammu and Kashmir – must leave the region, allowing Jammu and Kashmir to reunite and return to its pre-Partition status. These nationalists too have come under state scrutiny as they openly challenge Pakistan's hold over Kashmir. Unable, in many cases, to stand up for elections or hold public office without swearing their allegiance to Pakistan and expressing an explicit desire for Jammu and Kashmir's accession to Pakistan, they detail stories of discrimination and mistreatment.³⁶ Through protests and rallies, through social media and occasional public speeches, they try to keep the nationalist struggle alive against the crackdowns by the state. Their support is further undermined by the fact that a significant proportion of locals does not believe that Kashmir can survive without Pakistan or India, as oppressive as they may be. They feel that an independent Kashmir will be like grass caught in between two nuclear-armed elephants, and so it is their best bet to stay with either of them. The nationalists, therefore, have been unable to bring a substantial change in the status quo but nonetheless remain a significant stakeholder in the region.

By looking at the experiences and aspirations of the locals, the refugees and the nationalists, it becomes apparent that Azad Kashmir is not a monolithic entity with single unifying politics. The tensions between these groups remain active while the region as a whole continues to be linked with the larger Kashmir conflict. Yet, over the years it has been ignored not only by international actors but also by Pakistan. Azad Kashmir is seldom in the news unless it is to bolster the state narrative against Indian policies, including the ongoing ceasefire violations. Controlled mainly by Islamabad, there has been little attention and focus on the state of affairs of this region. During periods of firing, the civilian government is hardly found by the LoC, with locals having to build their own bunkers and make their own arrangements to survive. Most villages have poor infrastructure, weak communication channels, partially damaged roads, lack of proper sewerage and inadequate medical facilities. Close to 50 percent of the population lacks access to piped water.³⁷ The refugee camps are in no better condition. Poor development indicators, including an alarmingly high unemployment rate (14.4 percent in 2016 as compared to 6.2 in Pakistani provinces)³⁸ and doctor-to-patient ratio (in 2015, it was reported that the average population per doctor stood at 4,799 as compared to 1,127 in Pakistan)³⁹ mar the region. Censorship and crackdowns on free speech mean that many grievances are suppressed. Reportedly, newspaper offices have been shut down, publishing houses closed and books banned,⁴⁰ whenever they challenge the official Pakistani narrative on Kashmir. This censorship on freedom of expression is met with restrictions on freedom of movement. Military checkpoints and surveillance are present across Azad Kashmir, particularly in areas close to the LoC. Locals too have to cross these checkpoints on a daily basis, the militarization of the region a constant reminder of a sense of occupation, especially for those espousing nationalist aspirations. While many locals are hesitant

to complain in fear of a backlash by the state, nationalists and the Kashmiri diaspora have frequently tried to highlight these excesses. After the 2005 earthquake, some of these grievances also made it to human rights reports. The Human Rights Watch shared that many Kashmiris believe:

The Pakistani military kept a close watch on the population to ensure political compliance and control; this was facilitated by the placement of military installations frequently in close proximity to populated areas . . . military presence that was more abuser than protector.⁴¹

These narratives show that Azad Kashmir must be considered as a significant affectee of the Kashmir conflict as well as a major stakeholder in the peace process. To sideline it and to assume homogeneity in terms of identity, politics and aspirations in this region is a grave oversight. Azad Kashmir continues to be linked to the larger Kashmir conflict not only because its territory has been used to fight for the Valley and it continues to host thousands of refugees from across the divide, but also because until the Kashmir dispute is resolved, Azad Kashmir will remain subject to cross LoC hostility, militarization and exploitation. What happens in other parts of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir will undoubtedly continue to impact Azad Kashmir too. With the recent legal changes in the status of Indian-administered Kashmir after the abrogation of Article 370, there are fears that the Pakistani government may use the precedent set by India to further increase its control over Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan too.

Azad Kashmir is a conflict zone; the gravest injustice is perhaps that it is not explicitly treated as one, and therefore, the required attention and assistance is seldom provided. Azad Kashmiri voices are drowned out against the violence erupting out of Indian-administered Kashmir and the statist versions offered by Pakistan and India. The impact of the ongoing conflict on this territory makes it pertinent to peel through these simplistic narratives and engage the region as an essential actor in finding a lasting solution to the dispute.

Notes

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- 3 Human Rights Watch, 'With Friends Like These', Vol. 18, No. 12, September 2006, p. 6, www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/pakistan0906webwcover_0.pdf [Accessed 15 May 2018].
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- 8 Rifat Fareed, 'The Forgotten Massacre that Ignited the Kashmir Dispute', *Al Jazeera*, 6 November 2017, www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/11/forgotten-massacre-ignited-kashmir-dispute-171106144526930.html [Accessed 28 May 2020].
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- 12 The full version of this interview, as well as several of the other interviews quoted in this essay, were first published in Zakaria, *Between the Great Divide*.
- 13 Emanuel Sarfraz, 'My Govt Looking after 40,000 Refugees: AJK PM', *The Nation*, 9 September 2017, <http://nation.com.pk/09-Sep-2017/my-govt-looking-after-40-000-refugees-ajk-pm> [Accessed 29 October 2017].
- 14 It should be noted that refugees have come into AJK at different points in time since 1947. This essay, however, focuses primarily on refugees that entered in and after 1989.
- 15 Recorded in an interview conducted by Qaiser Khan for a report on divided families: Qaiser Khan, *Tales of Separation and Reunion* (Pakistan: Center for Peace, Development and Reforms, 2018), p. 19.
- 16 Cabeiri Robinson, *Body of Victim, Body of Warrior* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), p. 1.
- 17 Ibid., p. 2.
- 18 Ibid., p. 4.
- 19 Khan, *Tales of Separation and Reunion*, pp. 4–6.
- 20 Asad Hashim, 'Kashmir Refugees Living a Life on Hold', *Al Jazeera*, 18 September 2013, www.aljazeera.com/indepth/%20features/2013/09/201391711186325937.html [Accessed 15 May 2018].
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- 39 Danish Khan, 'Underdevelopment in AJK', *The News*, 27 June 2015, www.thenews.com.pk/print/48195-underdevelopment-in-ajk [Accessed 15 June 2017].
- 40 Dawn, 'AJK Govt Bans 16 Books', 8 March 2016, <http://tns.thenews.com.pk/headway-sight/#.We3srGKC36> [Accessed 23 October 2017].
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5 Affective governance, disaster, and the unfinished colonial project

Saiba Varma

Maqbool Bhat, considered *Shaheed-e-Kashmir* or martyr of Kashmir's self-determination movement and founder of the Jammu Kashmir National Liberation Front (JKNLF) and Aasia Jeelani, a journalist and human rights activist who was killed in a landmine blast in Kashmir in 2004, both envisioned a sovereign, united, politically, and financially independent Kashmir. Their passionate arguments for self-reliance are undergirded by an acknowledgment of how political-economic dependencies produced by colonialism can fester as psychic dependences. Indeed, concerns over Kashmir's dependency and its territorial and resource sovereignty have long been central to Kashmir's fight for *azadi* (freedom) (Bhan 2018; Duschinski and Bhan 2017; Duschinski et al. 2018; Junaid 2013; Kaul 2013).

Since the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir was bifurcated in 1948, both Indian and Pakistan-controlled Kashmir have been made dependent on their incorporating states in a number of ways. Most recently, residents of both Gilgit-Baltistan and Jammu and Kashmir had their constitutionally granted autonomy revoked, enhancing direct rule from Islamabad and New Delhi. While the affective tenor of these moves are different, supporters of the *tehreek* (as Kashmir's struggle for self-determination is called) in Indian-controlled Kashmir have also noted other forms of dependency that obstruct the path to independence: the continuous buttressing of military, emergency, and security powers in favor of civil authority; the hollowing out of local economies and the financial dependency of Jammu and Kashmir on Indian state grants and aid (Trisal 2015); control of Kashmir's critical water resources (Bhan 2014); the sustained criminalization of pro-*azadi* politics in favor of pro-India political parties who have actively eroded self-determination demands (Kanjwal 2017); the fact that state governments or militaries are the largest and most stable employers in both Gilgit-Baltistan and Jammu and Kashmir (Ali 2019; Bhan 2014); and the extensive network of informers and collaborators deeply embedded in Kashmiri society whose lives and livelihoods are dedicated to undermining the *tehreek* and buttressing the occupation. The list goes on.

In Jammu and Kashmir, projects of dependency tend to be disguised in the language of "integration" or economic and humanitarian assistance. For example, as Mona Bhan has argued, the National Hydropower Corporation (NHC) – India's premier agency for hydropower development – which controls thousands of acres of land in Jammu and Kashmir (in addition to the roughly 131,840 acres under

the Indian military), does not describe itself as an “encroacher.” Rather, the NHC deploys an “emerging humanitarian discourse” (2014: 192) to represent itself as an “architect” of a caring, compassionate, and responsible regime of corporate governance. Similarly, the myriad forms of Indian military control exercised over Kashmiri civilians are not named as violence – despite the fact that they result in killing, wounding, or maiming – but are articulated through a language of paternalistic care, keeping people safe, and protecting the nation against “external” threats (Kaul 2018). Nitasha Kaul notes how Indian gendered masculinist nationalism has produced Kashmir as a “feminized landscape with a restive population that needs to be controlled, chastised, disciplined and coerced into affirming its ‘marital’ relationship with India” (2018: 128). In this chapter, I build on these arguments to show how Indian *militarized care* – a project of imperialism and state violence that disguises itself through the language of protection and care – rests on, and becomes a vector for, producing affects of dependency and obedience from Kashmiri subjects (see also Varma 2020).

In other words, I argue that political-economic dependency does not just produce psychic dependency, in the sense that the latter is epiphenomenal to the former. Rather, affective and moral control are central to the project of Indian state occupation. Indian state occupation is intentionally designed to produce in Kashmiris a certain psychological, affective, and emotional disposition vis-à-vis the Indian state. While the Indian military is deeply involved in occupying “space, bodies and resources” in Kashmir, it is also interested in “dominating discourses, emotions, and subjectivities” that reveal Kashmiris’ dependency (Ali 2019: 77; Junaid 2020). More than seven decades of Indian occupation show that it is not just enough to establish dependency through political-economic transformations, but that dependency must also be proven through proper emotional comportment. A “good” Kashmiri subject is one who is dependent on the Indian state for survival, but more importantly, one who performs and displays their obedience through appropriate bodily, emotional, and intersubjective gestures. Kashmiri Muslim bodies are continuously called upon to demonstrate their gratitude toward the Indian state, military, and public. Racialized demands that Kashmiri Muslims should be grateful pervade Indian popular consciousness and transcend political differences.

Militarized care is a mode of “affective governance” (Shoshan 2014) in two senses: first, it seeks to regulate and transform Kashmiri aspirations for self-determination into acquiescence to Indian rule; and second, because as a political project, Indian militarized care is itself saturated with affective demands, anxieties, and paranoia that are not always conscious or explicit. In this chapter, I examine state and popular demands of gratitude from Kashmiri Muslim in several scenes of militarized care: in the way Indian rule over Kashmir is discursively figured and justified; in public, clinical, and institutional settings; and finally, in the aftermath of the 2014 flood disaster. In each of these scenes, gratitude appears as a “political emotion” (Hage 2009) that is both a necessary *and* insufficient response to the gift of militarized care. Yet, at the same time, demands for gratitude establish a highly unequal political terrain in which Kashmiris are positioned

as perennial recipients, as already always indebted to Indian largesse. Gratitude has an asymptotic quality – the gratitude that Kashmiris display is never adequate, never enough, and this lack becomes the engine for more militarized care (see also Pinto 2020). As we will see in the narrativization of the 2014 floods, in particular, gratitude emerges first as a sign of Kashmiris’ willingness to integrate with India and their acquiescence to Indian rule, but as the emergency progresses, it becomes a symptom of the failure of integration (see also Ahmed 2013), and thus grounds for the further criminalization of Kashmiri Muslim bodies.

In demonstrating gratitude as a mode of racialized affective governance demanded of Kashmiri Muslim bodies, I draw on recent works in anthropology and other disciplines on empire, domesticity, intimacy, and affect (Ahmed 2013; Ali 2019; Ghosh 2006; Di Gregorio and Merolli 2016; Hochschild 2003; Povinelli 2006; Stoler 2010). Despite the significant differences in Kashmiris’ relations to India and Pakistan, the territory of Kashmir under both Indian and Pakistani control has long been a site of intense affective control, including “love and betrayal, loyalty and suspicion, beauty and terror” (Ali 2019: 2). Additionally, feminist scholars have foregrounded the ways affective labor is connected to racialization and gender (Evans and Moore 2015; Gutierrez-Rodriguez; Vora 2015; Whitney 2016). For example, Gutierrez-Rodriguez’s work (2010: 128) on racialized migrant women in middle-class European homes poses the profound question of how marginalized bodies “deal with the constant experience of inequality, how [they] digest it emotionally and bodily.” In the context of Indian-controlled Kashmir, I am interested in exploring how Indian militarized care places Kashmiri Muslim bodies in a relation of indebtedness to the colonizer (Hochschild 2003), and how they must perform affective labor in order to survive. How are these messages of indebtedness conveyed and how do Kashmiris digest and respond to that “constant experience of inequality?”

An affective approach to citizen–state relations sheds light on governance as not a purely rational and administrative exercise of state authority, but as guided by anxieties and insecurities, including “nervousness” (Aretxaga 2003; Di Gregorio and Merolli 2016: 934; Fortier 2010; Isin 2004; Hunt 2016; Mazzarella 2010; Shoshan 2014). As scholars have argued, governance serves as a site for much more than mere optimization or efficiency; rather, governance refers to “a social field for the elaboration and mediation of cultural and political projects . . . that are wrought of affect and uncertainty” (Shoshan 2014: 152–3). Affective governance also gains analytic specificity in the fact that not all citizens are hailed by affective governance in the same way. Those already marginalized are subjected to more intensive forms of affective governance than others. For example, Anne-Marie Fortier (2010) describes how design interventions in multicultural neighborhoods in Britain are meant to produce feelings of “assimilation” among citizens of different racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Within this framework, affects like “cohesion” and “assimilation” become indicators of multicultural success. Building on this work, from the perspective of the postcolonial Indian state, there is a near-obsessive desire to have minoritized subjects, particularly Muslims, and more so, Kashmiri Muslims, display and perform their loyalty and gratitude to

state bureaucracies, as well as to a more abstract nation-state. As Junaid argues, the discourse of loyalty, which operates at both collective and individual levels, operates as a form of “cultural-moral turmoil that underwrites and reproduces violence, especially when directed at individuals as an accusation” (2020: 166).¹ These demands reveal the nature of Indian rule, which presents itself as magnanimous, but which in fact keeps Kashmiris in a position of affective, psychic, and material dependency.

To make this argument, I first provide some background as to how Indian militarized care represents itself in the idiom of the gift and how it is a mode of “affective governance” designed to produce displays of gratitude in Kashmiri subjects. Next, I focus on the devastating floods that struck the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir in 2014 and the forms of Indian militarized care that followed. As several scholars have noted, the 2014 floods brought questions of sovereignty and dependency very much to the surface (Bhan 2018; Kanth and Ghosh 2015a, 2015b).

Governed by the gift

As Kashmir studies scholars have noted, Kashmir has, for centuries, been a site of intense emotional investment for its colonizers (Kabir 2009; Kaul 2018; Varma 2020). Images of Kashmir have been and continue to be highly fetishized since the art of landscape photography was developed in the nineteenth century (Kabir 2009). Since Partition, the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir is often described in Indian political discourse as an “integral limb” (*atoot ang*) and “crown jewel” of the Indian nation. Indian rule in Kashmir has been expressed through tropes of love and care (Varma 2020), and the nation is imagined as an “anthropomorphically imagined affective political entity” (Hage 2009: 66). In the postcolonial period, inherited colonial fantasies of Kashmir as a “heavenly” landscape became entangled with the trauma of Partition, creating a zone of intense desire and ambivalent longing, a lingering sense of an unfinished colonial project.

Anxieties around the failure of Kashmiri Muslims to properly “integrate” with Hindu majoritarian India have led to multiple interventions by the Indian state – from military repression and violence to counterinsurgency to economic overinvestments. As a result of its dual status as a highly desired and highly precarious region, the state of Jammu and Kashmir has consistently received disproportionate aid from the Indian government. India’s first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, once described aid packages to Kashmir as “golden chains” (Trisal 2015). Far from disinterested, economic aid has been deliberately used to produce relations of dependence and sentiments of loyalty. As Hafsa Kanjwal notes, under Sheikh Abdullah (1947–1953), Kashmir had greater financial autonomy and rarely accepted funds from the Government of India. However, in order to propel his modernizing agenda and *Naya Kashmir* program, Kashmir’s next prime minister, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad (1953–1963) agreed to ratify the Instrument of Accession in exchange for funding those programs (Kanjwal 2017: 37). This shrewd bargain made Kashmir’s economy financially dependent on India’s while curtailing legal demands for self-determination.

Through the decades, the state of Jammu and Kashmir has received a disproportionate share of aid and loans from the central Indian government. Starting in the 1950s, nearly 90 percent of the state's Five-Year Plans were funded by the central Indian government, while other states such as Bihar received 70 percent. Between 1957 and 1962, Kashmir received the highest per capital grant-in-aid (Rs. 41.7), almost seven times higher than other states in the country (Rs. 6). The state also received special grants in the form of food subsidies and central assistance for the development of border areas, state police, additional battalions, and border check posts (Kanjwal 2017). More recently, a report by the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India in 2015 found that, between 2000 and 2016, Jammu and Kashmir received 10 percent of all central government grants, despite having only 1 percent of India's population, and over 54 percent of the state's revenue came from central government grants. Aid packages continue to flow to Jammu and Kashmir despite repeated castigations by central government officials about "serious financial irregularities" in the state (Raghavan 2016). While articulated in the language of care, these economic overinvestments have always been accompanied by repressive state practices, including militarization and the suppression of pro-freedom and pro-Pakistan sentiments. This combination of economic dependency and political repression has been the primary way that the Indian state has tried to maintain the loyalty of Kashmir's ruling class and the population as a whole.

Indian military and counterinsurgency projects are also modes of "affective governance." The language of defense and national security is combined with counterinsurgency efforts to "win hearts and minds." These projects became particularly important after Kashmir's armed struggle began waning in the early 2000s, when the ratio of Indian soldiers to insurgents became 1000:1. Despite the military victory, Kashmiris had grown increasingly wary of Indian rule. The language and tools of affective governance intensified and became more explicit as a direct response to what Indian observers perceived as a growing "alienation" in the civilian population. For example, Rahul Bhonsle, a former Indian military commander, described how the Indian military's efforts in Kashmir now needed to focus on a "long drawn-out, sustained strategy" to ensure "a steady, positive trajectory of transformation" in the population (Bhonsle 2009: 11). This statement tacitly recognized that a military victory had failed to translate into a collective emotional and psychological acquiescence to Indian rule. Rather, in many cases, aversion to Indian rule had only grown more pronounced, thanks to gross human rights violations, a lack of state accountability, and unfettered militarization (Human Rights Watch 1993a, 1993b; IPTK 2009, 2012). The turn to what Bhan (2014) described as "heart warfare" was no doubt influenced by other political shifts as well: the metamorphosis of Kashmir's armed struggle into a mass, nonviolent, and popular social movement and the ascension of state-level political parties such as the People's Democratic Party (PDP) that promised to bring a "healing touch." In response, the Indian military and state began prioritizing counterinsurgency tools that would enable "positive" psychological transformations in the civilian population, help remake civilian-military relations, and redress

the “trust deficit” that had developed between the Indian military and Kashmiri population (Bhan 2014). In recent years, “heart warfare” has included Operation *Sadbhavana* (Goodwill), an employment program designed to win loyalty in border areas, rebuild schools, mosques, and roads, offer computer, sports, and other vocational programs to youth, and developing psychosocial programs such as substance abuse clinics and mental health programs across the state (Aggarwal and Bhan 2009; Varma 2016).

While “winning hearts and minds” projects constitute a tiny fraction of the Indian military’s overall budget in Kashmir, Indian rule itself can be increasingly understood as a mode of “affective” and psychological governance targeted toward bringing “alienated” Kashmiris back into the fold of the Indian nation. The unresolved political crisis in Kashmir is more and more framed as a problem of “alienation” – i.e. as a subjective “state of mind” – rather than one with long-standing political roots. By creating grateful, obedient, and dependent subjects through Indian militarized care, it is believed that Kashmiri political aspirations for independence will disappear. Yet, far from being a gesture of magnanimity, forms of “heart warfare” must be understood within the framework of militant nationalism. As Sara Ahmed (2013) has noted, compassion works in a very particular way in this discourse: through the nation’s compassion, the suffering of others can be repaired and the nation can be “restored” or “healed.”

Affective governance thus becomes a way for the Indian state to deliberately hide and misread Kashmiri calls for independence as calls for more aid or attention (i.e. more dependency). For example, after pro-Independence protests broke out in the summer of 2016, Prime Minister Narendra Modi issued a statement in which he said young people should be given “laptops” instead of stones. This deliberate misreading of the pro-freedom sentiments behind the protests revealed how the Indian state believes the population can be “won over” through gifts of economic aid. Similarly, in 2018, the Chairman of the pro-India National Conference, Omar Abdullah, described how an “atmosphere of despondency, doom and anxiety in the valley” was “alienating the youth in the absence of constructive and reconciliatory politics” (“Kashmiri Youth Getting Alienated: National Conference,” *Deccan Herald*). Embedded in this mobilization of the language of alienation was the prefigured assumption of reconciliation. Alienation is always described as temporary and reversible – the political equivalent of a child feeling neglected by their parents (I use the paternalistic metaphor here deliberately since it is a part of Indian popular discourse vis-à-vis Kashmir) – a situation rectifiable through greater care and attention. Alienation thus becomes the ruse for increased state involvement; it implies the possibility and inevitability that “sulking” subjects can be brought back into a nationalist embrace. Yet, care, too, has its limits. While the gift of Indian militarized care and economic aid are constructed as magnanimous, they are always given with the expectation of return.

In the Indian political imaginary, Kashmiri Muslims have repeatedly failed to reciprocate the gift of Indian care, leading to popular assertions that they are “spoiled.” I have frequently heard middle-class Indians complain about the subsidized goods and commodities that people in Jammu and Kashmir receive from the

central government. These discussions inevitably lead to a censuring of Kashmiris and their ungratefulness, expressions of resentment at the “favorable” treatment they have received, racist assumptions about perennially problematic Muslim and now increasingly “radicalized” subjects, and an unspoken anxiety that the strategy of buying Kashmiris’ loyalty has failed. Meanwhile, for Kashmiris themselves, far from being magnanimous, Indian militarized care is at best disingenuous, and at worst, poisonous (Trisal 2015). Far from being an act of generosity, Kashmiris understand Indian militarized care and economic and humanitarian aid as producing both political-economic and psychic dependency. In other words, they exemplify the paradox of the gift. According to Derrida, a gift is something that cannot appear as such, as it is destroyed by anything that proposes equivalence or recompense, as well as anything that even proposes to know or acknowledge it (Derrida 1992: 29–30). The gift of Indian care in all its forms is thus not a gift at all, because it is always undercut by demands for reciprocity and loyalty.

In the next section, I show how Indian militarized care is a form of affective governance and how Kashmiris are disciplined to be grateful in a range of public and private settings.

Making grateful subjects

Like other modes of counterinsurgency globally, Indian militarized care represents itself as “a kinder, gentler counter-terrorism” (Gilmore 2011). The Indian military, paramilitary, and police are committed to outward demonstrations and expressions of their generosity toward Kashmiris – demonstrations that disguise ongoing forms of brutal military violence and state repression – and render Indian occupation a therapeutic and caring project (Varma 2020). These performances of care are not one way, of course, but always contain a relational demand. There is always a Kashmiri Muslim subject on the receiving end, enacting gratitude and obeisance, showing the proper way to receive the gift of Indian militarized care. These moral and affective demands suffuse the Indian military’s public relations machinery, as well as public and institutional settings.

For example, in the image shown in Figure 5.1, posted on an Indian army “fan” Twitter page, an Indian soldier – well clad in COVID-19 protective gear – hands a gift to three young Kashmiri children. The highly choreographed image shows the soldier bending toward the children in a gesture of kindness, maintaining the proper flow of care from the militarized state (giver) to “vulnerable” citizens (recipient). The children are smiling and happily accepting the gift. The image constructs the soldier as a doubly caring agent, there to dole out the gifts of national belonging, protection, material assistance, and even joy, as well as one who has also taken the necessary health and safety precautions in the midst of an ongoing pandemic (even though the children themselves lack any protection). The absence of any adult Kashmiri figures in the frame suggests that the soldier is the paternal stand-in. Meanwhile, Kashmiris are collectively represented through the figure of children, a trope that, as I discussed earlier, repeats itself in the postcolonial Indian imaginary. The magical thinking involved in this image becomes particularly stark



Figure 5.1 Soldiers and Civilians/Peace Is the Destination (Courtesy Indian Army Fans Twitter Account)

if we consider the multiple forms of violence and harm that have emanated from Indian security forces to wards female Kashmiri civilians (Batoool 2018).

In another example, a billboard on the Jammu–Srinagar highway – the only roadway connecting the Kashmir Valley to the rest of India – shows an elderly Kashmiri man bowing and cupping his hands to receive water from the flask of a

young Indian soldier. This public sign also reinscribes ideas of a robust, benevolent, militarized nation caring for an enfeebled Kashmiri body politic through forms of embodied deference and inferiority (Appadurai 1985). As Appadurai has argued, embodied demonstrations of gratitude are frequently nonverbal and are connected to social hierarchies. They can include “the touching of feet of the superior, lowering or averting one’s eyes, the use of honorific titles and respectful terms of address, the bodily postures of dependence, the tones of deference” (1985: 237). Barring specific religious and cultural contexts, giving is axiomatically a sign of superiority and receiving a sign of inferiority. The poster of the elderly Kashmiri man and young Indian soldier exemplifies the forms of embodied deference that Appadurai describes, but it also flips them. It is not the young soldier, but the elderly Kashmiri man who is bowed, eyes lowered, while the young Indian soldier stands over him, authoritatively. While the poster establishes intimacy between soldiers and civilians – a key trope of counterinsurgency – the image also carefully maintains caste distinctions. The elderly man and the soldier do not share water from the same flask; rather, the soldier pours out water for him, thus maintaining his caste purity.

The tweet and the billboard both repeat the same slogan: *Jawan aur awam, aman hai muqam*, “Soldiers and Civilians, Peace Is the Destination.” The slogan, which asserts that the Indian state and Kashmiri civilians are equal, cooperating partners working toward peace, is contradicted by the two extremely hierarchical images of the idealized soldier–civilian relationship. The Kashmiri subjects who are represented – young children and an older person, respectively – are considered worthy of care only because they are rendered apolitical and innocent (Ticktin 2017). Moreover, while intimacy and proximity are celebrated in these images, there is an underlying and unbridgeable difference maintained in both – the gift-giving soldier is adequately protected from viral infection while the Kashmiri children remain open and vulnerable to it; the soldier and the elderly man share water but the soldier will not be “polluted” by the elderly man’s touch or substance. Finally, it is important to ask who is missing from these representations. Kashmiri teenagers and adults, particularly young men, are excluded from the calculus of militarized care (for them, only the most brutal military tactics will do). Despite its claims to magnanimity, then, Indian militarized care reveals itself to be profoundly selective.

Messages of how Kashmiris should receive the gift of Indian militarized care were present not just in the military’s propaganda messages, but in spaces of military and humanitarian care as well. From 2009 to 2011, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork at a free, inpatient substance abuse program run by the Jammu and Kashmir police, known as the Drug De-Addiction Centre (DDC). The DDC was part of the Jammu and Kashmir police’s growing suite of humanitarian and social programs, designed to transform the police’s image and “win hearts and minds” in the region. As I have described elsewhere (Varma 2016), because the DDC was an inpatient program with only eight patients, and because it was positioned explicitly as a “social mission,” clinicians prioritized social and psychological interventions over pharmacological ones. This led them to focus intensively on patients’

words and narratives, as well as on establishing a new form of sociality in which former addicts were encouraged to share stories of addiction and recovery with each other during group therapy. Because clinicians believed that patients suffered from denial and used language to manipulate others in order to further their addiction, patients had to tell public “recovery narratives” during group therapy (see also Kaiser et al. 2020). These “recovery narratives” had to not only demonstrate that patients had gained insight into their disease, but also show their gratitude toward the Jammu and Kashmir police. Gratitude, in other words, was a key indicator of recovery. If they could not perform these recovery narratives successfully, patients were deemed as still requiring further treatment.

The recovery narratives were highly formulaic and patients quickly learned how to tell them in a way that would please the clinicians and police personnel. The narratives usually began with the patient introducing himself (all the patients in the DDC were men), describing which drugs he used and how often, referring to specific triggers (such as peer influence), and concluding with statements about their transformation at the hands of the police and expressions of verbal gratitude. Recovery narratives often ended with public proclamations of *mehrbani* (gratitude/thanks) toward the clinicians, often while police administrators were present. These statements of gratitude emplaced the patient in a relationship of ongoing indebtedness and inferiority vis-à-vis the police. Many patients expressed concern that the police would call in the favor for providing substance abuse treatment to them in the future by entangling them in collaborator or informer roles.

It was into this milieu of militarized care, full of subliminal and explicit messages for Kashmiris to be grateful to and submissive toward a militarized Indian state, when came the 2014 floods, the biggest natural disaster to hit the region in more than 60 years.

Catastrophe

In recalling the 2014 floods, many Kashmiris described it to me as a “catastrophe” (*tabahi*). On September 2, 2014, it started raining across Jammu and Kashmir and moderate rain and thundershowers continued in most places for the next four days. By September 4, a flood alert was issued for the entire state, and some southern regions, such as Kulgam, were already under water. The water levels of the region’s major rivers – the Chenab, Jhelum, Tawi, and Sind – continued to rise, breaching their banks in many places. By September 7, when the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi took an aerial survey of the flood-affected areas, a large part of Srinagar city as well as south Kashmir was already submerged under 15 feet of water, with red alert warnings issued for north Kashmir (Kanth and Ghosh 2015a). The state government, ill-prepared for the disaster despite prior warnings, was soon paralyzed. In a tweet that was later parodied across social media for how tone-deaf it seemed, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah tweeted, “Please don’t panic, we will reach you, I promise.” As many pointed out, given that electricity lines had been cut, the Chief Minister’s tweet and “promise” literally reached no one (“Omar Abdullah to Flood Victims: We Will Reach You”

www.india.com/news/india/omar-abdullah-to-flood-victims-we-will-reach-you-142222/). By the time the floodwaters receded of rescue, 450 people had lost their lives, 600,000 had been stranded for weeks, the region's infrastructure was severely damaged, and financial losses soared to between 5,000 and 6,000 crore rupees (\$777 million).

Initial news of the flood immediately spurred a frenzied response from the Indian media. National English and Hindi language news media focused on the role of the Indian armed forces and the National Disaster Relief Force's (NDRF) relief operations, named Mission Sahayata (Assistance) and Operation Megh Rahat (Cloud Relief). Indian journalists embedded themselves with Indian armed forces or the NDRF, skewing reportage toward a state-sanctioned narrative that glorified rescue. By contrast, many Kashmiri journalists were trapped in the floods and unable to report on the situation on the ground. In fact, Kashmiri presses only returned to work eighteen days after the floods hit (Kanth and Ghosh 2015a). The tenor of the media narratives was celebratory. For example, India TV, a national Hindi-language television channel, described the Indian Army as "an army of heaven-sent angels." Other news outlets faithfully repeated the Indian Army's daily press briefings, which emphasized the rationality, scale, and efficacy of the rescue efforts, without qualification or corroboration. News channels carried daily updates of the numbers of people rescued, the tons of food dropped, and the number of engineer teams working on the ground.

Despite their claims to impersonal bureaucratic efficiency, the relief efforts were, from the very beginning, highly affectively and politically charged. Not only were they used to extol the efforts of the Indian security forces and NDRF, but relief itself was seen as an extension of ongoing Indian militarized care efforts in the region and as a sign of Kashmiri acquiescence to Indian rule. For example, one twitter user @PradnyaLotikar wrote, "All Indian r helpin d #KashmirFlood victims! This is wat u get wen u jus stay in India imagine d luv they wil receive once they bcom INDIAN!" ([sic] September 7, 2014). Several mainstream news channels as well as social media outlets asked whether and how the floods were a "turning point" in Indian-Kashmiri relations. Several news reports emphasized how the relief showed that defense forces were "winning hearts" in Kashmir.

In other words, rescue and relief efforts were transformed into an opportunity to measure and enact the goal that Bhonsle had described as the "steady, positive trajectory of transformation" in the population. For a moment, it appeared that decades of counterinsurgency efforts had paid off and Kashmiri hearts and minds had been won.

The Indian media prefigured the rescue efforts as a raging counterinsurgency success. Several reports highlighted how the heroic actions of Indian security forces had wiped away popular support for pro-independence politics, or at least had showed it to be fickle. One report, on the English-language station, CNN IBN, was titled, "Defence forces' heroics expose separatists, intellectuals," with a byline stating how "the defence and security forces have emerged as the saviors of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, saving tens of thousands of lives" (www.news18.com/news/india/kashmir-floods-defence-forces-heroics-expose-separatists-intellectuals-712547).

html). The 24-hour English-language and supposedly left-leaning news station, NDTV, similarly hosted a prime-time show, entitled, “Armed forces at heart of rescue – a turning point in Kashmir” (www.ndtv.com/video/news/the-buck-stops-here/watch-armed-forces-at-heart-of-rescue-a-turning-point-in-kashmir-337536). In addition to celebrating the selflessness of the Indian armed forces, several news stories, including the NDTV report, also explicitly demanded that Kashmiris now “chasten” themselves to the forces of militarized care.

Social media, and the use of hashtags, in particular, also helped engender a nationalistic, Hinduized “networked public” (Papacharissi 2015) that positioned itself as the moral arbiter of Kashmiri sentiments in response to militarized care. As scholars of news media have argued, “hashtags serve as empty signifiers that invite ideological identification of a polysemic orientation or framing devices that allow crowds to be rendered into publics; networked publics that want to tell their story collaboratively and on their own terms” (Papacharissi 2015: 2). Drawing on Raymond Williams’ work on “structures of feeling,” Papacharissi (2015: 3) argues that the “soft and networked architectures of online media” render and reorganize “the affectively sensed and internalized atmosphere of the here and now.” For Indian publics who have for decades been suspicious and wary of Kashmiri Muslim bodies, hashtags such as #Kashmirfloods, #KashmirArmykesaath (Kashmir is with the Army), and #showsomegratitude became ways of both expressing nationalistic and xenophobic pride in the military’s actions and marking out an undeserving and subservient Kashmiri public. One tweet demanded that critics of the Indian government should be “ashamed” given the contrasting moral uprightness of the Indian army in Kashmir against the actions of Pakistan police officials attacking civilians in Gilgit-Baltistan that were being circulated on social media.

Yet, despite the assertiveness of these narratives, the suspicion, doubt, and “nervousness” (Hunt 2016) that undergirds Indian military rule in Kashmir soon erupted. The assumption – and hope – that Kashmiris had reformed in the face of militarized care gave way to the conclusion that they had, once again, betrayed the gift. One news article, written by an “independent disaster management consultant” for the Government of India, provocatively asked: “Will army’s flood relief operations win over Kashmiri hearts?” echoing the “hearts and minds” language of counterinsurgency (Fernandes, Lancelot, Rediff News, www.rediff.com/news/report/jk-flood-will-armys-flood-relief-operations-win-over-kashmiri-hearts/20140910.htm). The author continued:

As with anywhere else in India, the army and the Indian Air Force were at the forefront of the rescue operations after the recent floods in Jammu and Kashmir. By all accounts, they have done a stellar job. This would not have created a controversy elsewhere but because it is Kashmir, it provoked an ugly fight even in such tragic times . . . Many “nationalist” and “Right Wing” commentators spoke of the ungratefulness of the Kashmiris towards the army . . . but the separatist Kashmiri keyboard warriors were no different [and] took great pleasure in posting the images of destroyed Indian army vehicles and camps and celebrated the death of two soldiers washed away in

rescue operations.² . . . If memory serves right, more than 150 bridges were so constructed in the Kashmir region by the army since 1996. Did those bridges bring the Kashmiris closer to the army or the state government? Hardly. Will it be any different this time? Unlikely. *Because you can't shake hands with someone with a closed fist.*

The author bemoans the politicization of the disaster on “both sides,” creating a false equivalence between the capacities of the Indian state and Kashmiri activists. He also imagines rescue and rebuilding efforts as voluntary gestures of goodwill and friendship (through the idiom of “shaking hands”), rather than as either forms of state obligation in the aftermath of a major disaster or as strategies designed to produce forced dependency. The imaginary of friendship clearly places the onus on Kashmiri civilians, who must display their morality by properly accepting militarized care, rather than on the military, whose presence has been a source of insecurity and violence in the region. Finally, the author uses the image of a “closed fist” to describe Kashmiris’ response to the gesture of militarized care. Here, a “closed fist” refers to a stubborn unwillingness on the part of Kashmiris to receive the gift of friendship from the Indian state. Yet Fernandes is seemingly oblivious to the alternative genealogy of a closed or clenched fist as not a stubborn refusal, but a long-standing political gesture of resistance by worker’s rights organizations, the Black power movement, and other marginalized communities against forces of domination (Korff and Peterson 1992).

Televised spectacles of “grateful” Kashmiris being “saved” by the very occupying forces they oppose soon gave way to stories of “ungrateful” Kashmiris refusing Indian aid. Media accounts failed to contextualize the refusals of Indian aid within histories of occupation and militarized care. As such, the actions of Kashmiris on the ground appeared senseless and irrational. How or why would someone refuse lifesaving aid? As Kanth and Ghosh (2015a) have also noted, despite there being similar stories of community protest in the aftermath of the Uttarakhand floods in response to inadequate rescue efforts, media coverage of Kashmir refusals of aid were much more prominent, because they conveniently fed into existing narratives of “separatist incitement” and “disruptive elements” (Kanth and Ghosh 2015a: 10) – of a society that was morally incorrigible. These stories obfuscated emerging evidence about the unevenness of militarized care and the consistent prioritization of official and military lives and property over civilians (Kanth and Ghosh 2015a: 10).

Narratives of rescue efficiency and certainty were also being contradicted by reports on the ground. Competing accounts of the flood and its aftermath emerged. While the Indian armed forces and media claimed that they were forced to take on all rescue and relief operations because of the collapse of the state government, Kashmiris themselves argued that the army had been overwhelmed rescuing and securing its own encampments and personnel for the first 24 hours of the disaster. Despite army claims that more than 200,000 civilians had been rescued, the only list of evacuees that was publicized contained only 881 names (Kanth and Ghosh 2015a: 148). Contra military magnanimity and “heaven-sent angels,”

ground reports revealed Indian militarized care to be racialized, hierarchized, and uneven, organized “according to a strict official rank-based priority and not on a first seen first saved basis” (Kanth and Ghosh 2015a: 148).

The absence of militarized care did not, however, only translate into abandonment. Rather, as Kanth and Ghosh’s (2015a) powerful report reveals, local mosques and community organizations quickly stepped in and organized relief camps, communal kitchens, and other essential services to cater to affected communities. Community volunteers took on the task of rescue upon themselves. These locally organized relief efforts galvanized Kashmiris and led to “a generalized spirit of freedom and defiance that was palpable everywhere on the streets” (Kanth and Ghosh 2015a: 159). While local relief efforts were not left untouched by militarism and there were attempts to thwart and block the work of community organizations, the flood nonetheless represented a turning point different than what was imagined by the Indian media and militarized care. Armed with the slogan, “*Joh Kashmir ko sailab se bachaya, woh Kashmir hamara hai*” (“The Kashmir we saved from the flood/That Kashmir belongs to us”), Kashmiris used the flood to refuse militarized care and instead enact mutual aid and care beyond dependency.

Conclusion

Modes of sovereign power are sustained not only through military techniques but also through the demand that some subjects must produce affects and emotions such as love and gratitude to prove their worthiness. As this chapter has shown, military techniques and modes of affective governance are often interwoven, as in the idea of “winning hearts and minds” and other counterinsurgency projects. Like other disasters that affect Otherized communities, the Kashmir flood demonstrates how discourses and claims of nationalist care and generosity are often underpinned by moral and affective demands for recipients of care to mold, discipline, and demur themselves to the state in particular ways. Indeed, for some Kashmiris, the flood represented “India’s Katrina” (Fazili n.d.).

While the Indian military and media attempted to create the flood as an exceptional event, one which could transform Kashmiri sentiments overnight and thus mark the completion of the Indian state’s colonial designs in the region, these efforts were ultimately undercut. Indian militarized care, undergirded by the logic of the gift, meant that care was never free but was always laden with expectations. The affective burden placed on Kashmiris to display their gratitude, as well as the perennial suspicion and doubt that festered underneath militarized care, meant that the gift was bound to fail. The Indian state fantasy of militarized care wiping away histories of alienation, dissatisfaction, and anger remained just that: a fantasy.

Meanwhile, as Kashmiris began to piece their lives back together after the flood, a very different narrative emerged. In April 2015, the civil society organization, JKCCS released a report on the vulnerability of ordinary Kashmiris in the flood. The report used a cartoon by Mir Suhail, a well-known Kashmiri cartoonist, as its cover (see Figure 5.2).

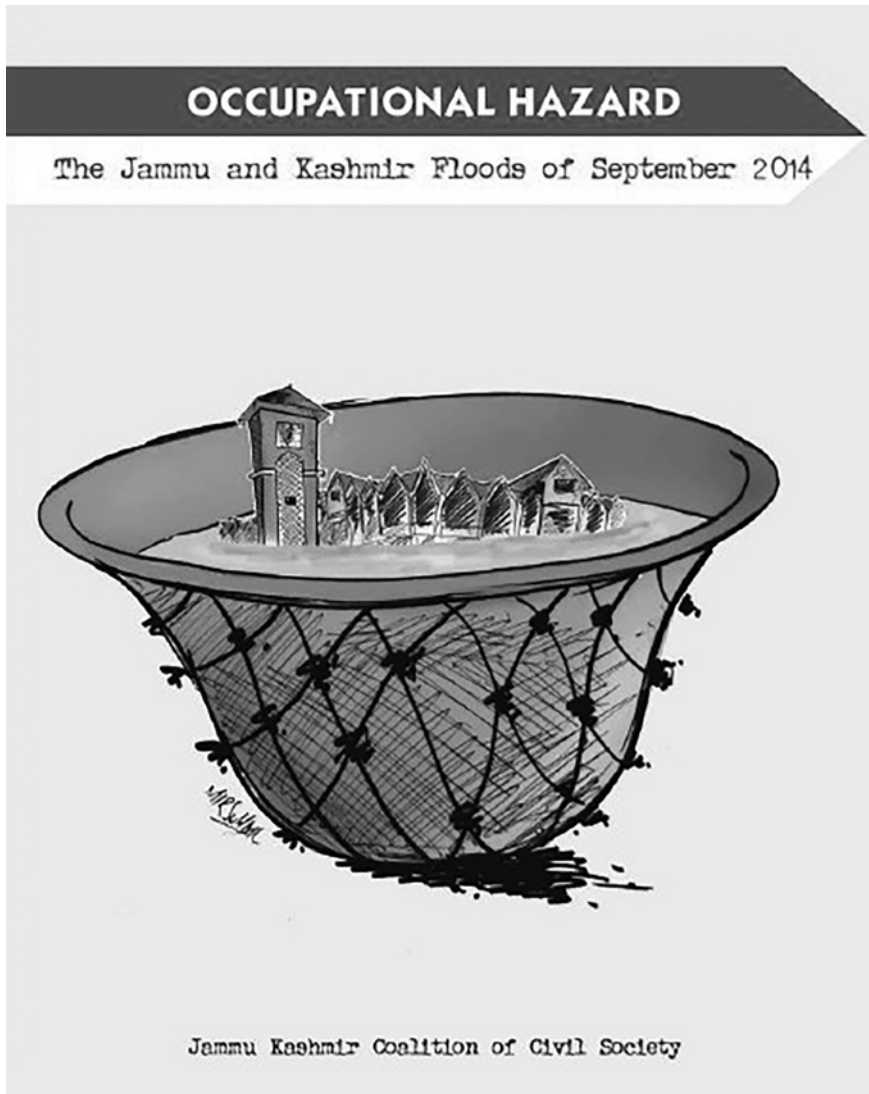


Figure 5.2 Cover of the JKCCS report on the Kashmir floods (Courtesy Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society)

The cartoon upends Indian military narratives of rescue and relief by showing the state government drowning under water *in* a soldier's hat, demonstrating how the flood was not apart from, or exceptional to, but rather, was very much contained within the logic of Indian military occupation. The aftermath of the disaster not only demonstrated the impossibility of Kashmiris ever meeting the gift of

Indian care, it also revealed how such refusals were transformed into lifesaving, locally run mobilization efforts. The disaster, designed to be a display of magnanimity in exchange for acquiescence, inadvertently showed how Kashmiris could survive without militarized care.

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Notes

- 1 By contrast, the Northern Areas are characterized by a different set of affective relations. As Ali argues for Gilgit-Baltistan, “the inhabitants of the region express a strong yearning for recognition and inclusion within the Pakistani nation-state, and feel a deep love and loyalty toward it – only to find themselves constantly alienated and betrayed” (Ali 2019: 2; Junaid 2020: 166). By contrast, in Indian nationalist imaginaries, Indians express a deep love for Kashmir (although not for its Muslim inhabitants) and find themselves constantly rebuked.
- 2 I did not come across any examples of this in my research for this article.

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6 Infrastructures of occupation

Mobility, immobility, and the politics of integration in Kashmir

Mona Bhan

In March 2017, the Indian government decided to “fast-track” hydropower projects worth \$15 billion on the rivers of the Indus basin in Kashmir, a territory splintered between India, Pakistan, and China and claimed in its entirety by both India and Pakistan.¹ The six rivers of the Indus River basin were also divided after India’s partition in 1960 through the Indus Water Treaty, a World Bank-brokered water distribution arrangement that allocated the waters of the Eastern rivers (Ravi, Sutlej, and Beas) to India and those of the Western rivers (Chenab, Jhelum, and the Indus mainstream) to Pakistan. Almost a year before the Indian government’s decision to expedite dam building in Kashmir, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had threatened Pakistan of unilaterally revoking the Indus Water Treaty after 19 Indian soldiers were killed in the border town of Uri, in an attack India blamed on Pakistan’s proxy war in Kashmir. Until this attack, dams in India were mostly presented as temples of modernity, as “instruments of democratization,” or as the country’s sustainable mantra to energy sufficiency (Marino 2012). After the Uri attack, dams and the waters of the Indus basin became part of Narendra Modi’s new instruments of foreign policy vis-à-vis Pakistan and India’s “diplomatic weapon”² to retaliate against a recalcitrant neighbor. To claim waters of the Indus River basin, to use “each drop of water” that belonged to Indians as Modi announced in one of his 2016 speeches, reinforced his government’s belligerent approach toward Pakistan. At the same time, for Modi, strengthening India’s control over Kashmir’s rivers meant sealing Kashmir’s fate as an integral part of India.

Although the frenzied construction of dams in Kashmir is by no means new, Modi’s BJP government has shown an “unyielding allegiance to running water” since it assumed power in 2014 (Schneider 2015). Underlying the repeated claims to harness 20,000 MW of untapped energy from Kashmir’s rivers to serve a power-starved country and boost industry and economic growth in Kashmir was the belief that infrastructural development could become a sustained tool to counter anti-India sentiments in Kashmir (Bhan 2014).³ During his 2014 visit to Kashmir, Modi called infrastructure, the “mother of development.”⁴ In his April 2017 speech to celebrate India’s longest road tunnel connecting Jammu with Kashmir, he foregrounded the “power of stones,” chastising youth who used them as weapons against the Indian military, while praising those who used them to build roads

and tunnels instead.⁵ Built infrastructure, he claimed, was a symbol of Kashmiri resilience, industriousness, and, most importantly, a concrete expression of Kashmir's integration with India. Modi was not the only one who emphasized the role that infrastructure could play in containing Kashmiri "insurgency." Many Indian commentators claimed that Kashmir needed "a compassionate spade to dig fresh ground; It need[ed] a dedicated team that [could] turn the spade of compassion into a shovel of feeling and sympathy" (Bedi 2014).

In a context where Kashmir remains a contentious territory between India, China, Pakistan, and also home to a three-decade long armed *tehrreek* for *aazadi* (freedom) from Indian rule, how might we understand the *concretization* of development and of India's collective imagination in which infrastructure such as roads, railway lines, tunnels, and dams extend India's colonial control over Kashmir's land and resources? How has India used infrastructural projects to assimilate Kashmir, a Muslim majority area, into India's religious and economic mainstream and establish it as an integral part of the Indian Union? And, how does India's infrastructure in Kashmir, which includes checkpoints, border walls, prisons, interrogation centers, airports, bridges, flyovers, and hydroelectric dams transform "familiar and intimate physical worlds" into zones of stasis, immobility, and confinement? (Kanth and Ghosh 2015; Bhan 2018; Bhan and Duschinski 2020: 288).

Recent work by Palestinian scholars has shown how the dense infrastructure of Israeli occupation dispossesses Palestinians, constraining their ability to move at will (Braverman 2009; Weizman 2012; Bishara 2015). Policies of "closure and separation" and physical structures fracture space to enforce a differentiated regime of mobility based on "ethnicity, religion, and nationality" (Peteet 2017: 2). In Kashmir, too, built infrastructure fragments villages, towns, and communities, rendering familiar places unrecognizable and carving out new geographies of policing and confinement. In this paper, based on my extended fieldwork in Gurez and Bandipora in Northern Kashmir, I discuss the ways in which communities experience the 330 MW Kishanganga dam as a border-making exercise and resist the new and intensified constraints on their everyday movements along the Line of Control (LoC).

In particular, I focus on a 23.5-kilometer-long water tunnel (Head Race Tunnel or HRT) that was designed to transport waters of the Kishanganga River across a 40-mile stretch from Gurez to the powerhouse in Bandipora, a bustling town and administrative district headquarter, where the offices of the NHPC (National Hydroelectric Power Corporation) and HCC (Hindustan Construction Company), the two corporations tasked with building the dam, are located. The HRT, I argue, is a technosocial assemblage that illuminates the ways in which border politics are constituted and assume particular infrastructural forms along the contested LoC. The following questions guide my inquiry: How did the HRT that was built using an Italian-imported Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM) represent fundamental transformations in the ways Kashmir's land and waterscapes were repurposed for defense, economics, and territorial integration? If material structures are not simply a mix of gravel and concrete but represent, in some cases, the ideology of the state, then

how might the Kishanganga dam and its associated infrastructure embody India's desire to assimilate Kashmir into India's sacred and cartographic imaginaries (see Humphrey 2005)? At the same time, if infrastructures are "built forms around which publics thicken," I ask what forms of publics were constituted around the tunnel and why (De Boeck 2012, cited in Harvey and Knox 2015: 5)? What might infrastructural interventions in Kashmir convey about the nature and ambitions of Indian territoriality and alternately, how might infrastructures become sites around which new and creative modes of resistance or spatiality take form (Anand 2017)?

Infrastructures of occupation

For most Kashmiris large-scale infrastructural projects, such as railway lines, highways, flyovers, and hydroelectric dams are not harbingers of development but manifest expressions of Kashmir's long-drawn occupation by India. Imposed through military might but also through strategic investments in design and architecture, Indian occupation of Kashmir relies on technical and seemingly apolitical components of planning and engineering to impose what Eyal Weizman calls vertical sovereignty in which Indian rule is no longer limited to the "surface of the [Kashmiri] terrain" alone but extends into Kashmir's strategic heights and depths, such as its mountains, hill-tops, high pasture grounds, airspaces, and mining and riverbeds (2007: 5, 12; Bhan and Duschinski 2020). Most Kashmiris for whom militarized violence in the form of extrajudicial deaths, torture, forced disappearances, sexual violence, and prolonged incarcerations has been a regular feature of everyday life since the early 1990s, slabs of iron, metal, and concrete, which extend from Kashmir's subsoil to its airspaces, also perform certain political roles that extend beyond their intended functionality. India's built infrastructure in Kashmir fosters disarray and "disorientation" as Kashmiris struggle to navigate the roads, highways, bridges, and spools of concertina wire that disrupt everyday geographies of travel and movement (Bishara 2015). For instance, the Jehangir Chowk–Rambagh expressway in Srinagar was the city's most "prestigious development project," commissioned in 2013 with an approximate budget of Rs. 396 crores (Akmali 2017). Instead of easing traffic, it lay unfinished in the middle of a crowded bazaar, dirtying the city in addition to causing traffic snarls and everyday anxieties among commuters. While the government blamed the ongoing situation of political unrest and inhospitable weather conditions for the delay, Kashmiris claimed that like the state government's other infrastructural projects, the flyover too, was a deliberate attempt to foment "structured chaos" in and around the city (Weizman 2012 [2007]: 4). Infrastructural investments in Kashmir such as roads and railways provide "minimal benefits to the local population," while achieving other ends, such as making the movement of "military men and materials" easier and more efficient (Kanth and Ghosh 2015: 64). A young man frustrated with the network of public roads and highways in Srinagar city, which prioritizes the movement of military convoys, told me how "experiencing Srinagar's traffic was like living in an occupation – one felt imprisoned, helpless, and suffocated, and ultimately, unable to think."

Similar sentiments of living in an “open prison” – with built infrastructure, such as dams, wires, walls, and tunnels, folding in, suffocating, and violently imposing itself over space and communities – were also shared widely by Gurezis, who live in a densely militarized river valley near the LoC. Seventy years of military operations in the region, starting from India and Pakistan’s first war in 1948, dispossessed villagers of their resources, a situation that worsened in 2009 when the NHPC started building the 330 MW dam on the Kishanganga River (Bauer and Bhan 2018). Piles of rubble, sand, and concrete as well as abandoned cars and automobiles polluted the landscape while large parts of a once free-flowing river were either slowed down or completely rerouted. The Kishanganga dam exerted spatial domination and sovereign control by substantially reconfiguring Kashmir’s landscape and altering the geography, flow, and volume of its rivers.

In the next few sections, I will discuss the ways in which Kishanganga’s design features, including its “high head” and its 23.5-km-long HRT, were key to the ongoing contestations between India and Pakistan over the terms of the Indus Water Treaty. The Kishanganga dam, India’s “prestige project,” was India’s strategic claim over the disputed waters of the Jhelum River, linked to its larger pursuit of claiming Kashmir as its integral part. In addition to materially altering the landscape, the Kishanganga dam stirred the right-wing Hindu imaginaries of the Indus River as a cradle of Hinduism, making river infrastructures central to reimagining India as a predominantly Hindu nation. At the same time, the glorification of the dam, particularly the HRT, as an engineering marvel, depoliticized the dam’s geopolitical effects and its long- and short-term implications for riverine communities. In the end, I show how while the Kishanganga’s HRT was a symbol of their confinement, riverine communities claimed the water tunnel, even if briefly, to reveal the intersections between regimes of immobility and India’s extractive politics of integration in Kashmir (see Dalakoglou and Harvey 2012).

Cross-border water wars and contested sovereignties

India and Pakistan’s ongoing contentions over transboundary rivers are not simply a fight over water but the result of unresolved and competing claims of sovereignty over Kashmir (Haines 2016: 2). While the Indus Water Treaty, a 1960 water-sharing and transboundary treaty is often hailed for surviving four wars between India and Pakistan, the treaty has all along been silent on Kashmir’s contested sovereignties (Haines 2016: 76). The treaty itself, which grants India rights over the Eastern rivers of the Indus River basin, the Ravi, Sutlej, and Beas and allocates to Pakistan the Western rivers of the Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab, is considered unusual since it divides entire rivers of the Indus basin between India and Pakistan instead of apportioning partial flows to each country.

The Indus transboundary river basin, which drains a total of 1.12 million square kilometers split between Afghanistan, China, India, and Pakistan, is particularly significant for Pakistan where the Indus River basin covers at least 65 percent of its territory and is considered to be the backbone of Pakistan’s food production and agricultural economy. In recent years, largely due to the effects of climate

change, glacial melting, and water scarcity, many experts have declared the Indus River basin to be “one of the planet’s most gravely threatened basins,” leading to a potential for increased conflict between hostile neighbors, particularly in the absence of a long-term settlement of Kashmir’s unresolved political status (Adeel and Wirsing 2017: 5). There is increased anxiety in Pakistan associated with India’s hydropower dams and barrages on the three Western rivers even though India and Pakistan’s domestic conflicts over water have been more violent (Roic et al. 2017: 57). Pakistani analysts claim that India could use its upper riparian position to either flood Pakistan or starve their already water-stressed country. India’s manipulation of Jhelum’s water, they claim, could cripple the economies of Pakistan and Azad Kashmir and lay waste vast tracts of agricultural land in the Punjab and Sindh provinces (Mirza 177–180).⁶ At the same time, the Wullar barrage has implications for Pakistan’s defense infrastructure because of how India could use the barrage for troop mobility and containment (see Mirza, *ibid.*). In recent years, such anxieties have intensified because of ecological changes in the Himalayas and also because of Narendra Modi’s hardline policy toward Pakistan, particularly as it relates to the terms of the Indus Waters Treaty. For instance, Narendra Modi’s belligerent threat in 2016 to unilaterally revoke the Indus Waters Treaty and his decision to suspend the biannual meetings of the Indus Water Commissioners from India and Pakistan made the possibilities of a full-scale water war real, destabilizing long-standing water-sharing arrangements between the two countries. If carried through, the revocation of the treaty, according to Pakistan’s then prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, would have been an “act of war” (Kugelman 2016).

Many critics of the IWT, even before it became a hot button issue in 2016, called it unfair and partial. For instance, a Pakistani analyst notes that while the Western rivers were originally meant only for Pakistan’s “unrestricted” use, certain addendums added to the IWT ensured that India could still use waters of the Western rivers for certain specified uses, putting Pakistan at a disadvantage through an unfair distribution of water rights between rival nation states (Kazi 2011). For Indian commentators, the IWT, despite its promise has been a “bad bargaining chip for India,” since, according to them, Pakistan received four times the amount of water compared to India (Jacob 2016).

Since the 1970s, Pakistani analysts have repeatedly accused India of violating the terms of the Indus Waters Treaty, fearing that India’s upper riparian status gives it a strategic advantage over Pakistan, an allegation with roots in the 1948 water crisis in West Punjab (in Pakistan). Following legal disputes over the waters of the Indus River in 1948, Indian engineers deliberately stopped the flow of water from East Punjab (in India), claiming their post-Partition “propriety rights” and insisting that water was “legally inseparable from the land over which it flowed” (Haines 2016: 44). Contrary to India’s position, Pakistan asserted its rights to the waters of the Indus based on prior use, a principle of “territorial integrity,” which stated that India as an upstream riparian had the responsibility to ensure availability of water to its lower riparian neighbor (Haines 2016: 49). These divergent conceptions continue to frame India and Pakistan’s competing

claims over waters of the Indus basin, particularly since the 1970s when India built its first hydroelectric project on the Chenab River. The disputes worsened and could no longer be resolved bilaterally in the 1990s when India started building the 990MW Baglihar dam and 330 MW Kishanganga dam on the Chenab and Jhelum, respectively (Dar 2011/2012, 2013). In 2005, Pakistan approached the World Bank to resolve its impasse with India over the design features of the 900 MW Baglihar hydroelectric project on the Chenab, while the subsequent conflicts over the Kishanganga dam further deteriorated their relationship. Pakistan approached the Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration in May 2010, the first time in the history of IWT that a transboundary water dispute was referred to the Court of Arbitration. Pakistan's objections were related to the inter-tributary diversion of the waters of Jhelum River, from Kishanganga to Bonar-Madumathi nullah, which, Pakistanis worried, would adversely impact agricultural activities and the power generation capacity of the 969 MW downstream Neelum–Jhelum hydroelectric dam in Muzaffarabad. It was clear that the design and technicalities of the dam were enmeshed with India and Pakistan's territorial politics, and dams contributed substantially to further the geopolitical discord over Kashmir (Akhter 2013: 26). Indeed, as Daniel Haines rightly argues, the IWT purposefully ignored addressing the territorial dispute over Kashmir, limiting itself to the technicalities of transboundary water sharing, but in doing so, it left unresolved the underlying cause of the India Pakistan conflict.

Among Kishanganga dam's many technical and design features that triggered disputes between India and Pakistan was the 23.5-kilometer-long HRT that cut through high mountains and dense forests in order to divert the waters of the Kishanganga from Gurez to the powerhouse in Bandipora. The HRT, Pakistani experts claimed, would impact Pakistan's economy by diverting a substantial 33 percent of the Kishanganga instead of only 10 percent as claimed by India. In 2013, when the Court of Arbitration made its decision, it was interpreted differently by analysts in India and Pakistan, with some calling it a success while others pointing to its total failure in safeguarding Pakistan's agriculture and hydropower sectors.

Kishanganga's high head?

While the rhetoric on dams is laced with the promise of progress, dam-building exercises are expressions of state power and legitimacy (D' Souza 2011; Gilmar-tin 2015). In Kashmir, they represent India's violent denial of Kashmiri sovereignty over their resources. India's control over the Western rivers is critical to its political vision of using Kashmir's rivers as commodities and as potential weapons of war.⁷ In 2015, a top Kashmiri bureaucrat in an interview told me that India had "spent far too much money on the Kishanganga dam, almost 11 crores per megawatt of power. This was at least four times more than what is usually spent on dams elsewhere." In a later interview in 2016, he claimed that based on existing market trends, the price per MW had gone up to 17 crores. For India, "spending so much money was a means of asserting control over a contested

river.” India treated Kishanganga as a “strategic national asset, and the dam was monitored directly by the Prime Minister’s office.” It was strategically located in a “gorge between two tall and lofty mountains” to make it less vulnerable to potential “internal attacks by militants and cross-border attacks from Pakistan.”

Unlike the J&K government officials, the engineers and officials of the NHPC tried hard to underplay the political deliberations that must have determined the Kishanganga dam’s location and design features. For them, design and location were technical matters, determined “naturally” by the contours of the river, the constitution of the rock and mountains, and Gurez’s ideal geology. Given India’s historic position to keep the politics of Kashmir separate from the technicalities of dam building on the Indus, and India’s insistence that dams were technical, not security, installations, the engineers and the NHPC officials shot down or ignored most of my questions. And, yet, there were moments when it was impossible for the NHPC officials to maintain the carefully orchestrated distinctions between technology and politics. For instance, details about whether the Kishanganga dam was a run of the river or a storage project was a technical question but turned into an uncomfortable political issue when the officials were forced to reveal how much water the dam would release into Pakistan, and to what extent would the altered riverine flows of the Kishanganga impact Pakistan. The NHPC’s uneasy dialogue with me confirmed that the International Court of Permanent Arbitration’s final decision in 2013 had not resolved the dispute over the Kishanganga dam, and any misspoken word by the NHPC could hurt India’s posturing as a benevolent neighbor.

Just as the dam’s other design details were politically contested, the tunnel, too, some J&K government officials claimed, was unnecessary – to them it was designed to satiate India’s competitive zeal against a pestering neighbor. A senior state official argued that “the NHPC could have provided enough hydraulic head for the generation of power in Gurez without boring the long tunnel, which adversely impacted populations and environments in Bandipora and Gurez.” Although the NHPC officials agreed that the Kishanganga dam’s head was a “high head” at 650 meters, they blamed it on J&K government’s shortsightedness. A senior NHPC official explained this further:

A head is what enables water to be dropped from an elevation. Along with the amount of water discharged, the head determines the total amount of energy that can be produced. But the JK government is too stupid to allow an increased discharge. They call us a colonial corporation and blame us for preying on Kashmir’s water resources. Because of this, they impose high water cess on us, but instead of paying it from our coffers, we charge it to the project cost. So while this is no particular loss for the NHPC, civilians end up paying more tariff. Besides, it impacts how we end up designing the dam.

For the NHPC officials then, the dam’s “high head” was a benevolent measure to “compensate” for the lower discharge allowed by the J&K government. While the NHPC officials did not hesitate to denounce the J&K government’s

“stupidity” and “short sightedness” on technical measures, they steered clear from foregrounding ongoing security or cross-border water contestations or elaborating why Kashmiris might consider NHPC’s interventions in Kashmir to be “colonial.” Politics, if and when it came up, was limited to providing Kashmiris the promise of “cheap and renewable energy.”

The innocence of infrastructure?

Much like the Indus Waters Treaty, which is overwhelmingly centered on Indian and Pakistani national interests, the public debate around the Kishanganga, too, reproduced the Indian and Pakistani positions, with very little attention on how communities in Gurez and Bandipora – the ones most affected by the dam – perceived or experienced hydraulic infrastructures.

Both Gurez and Bandipora are heavily guarded by military battalions and checkpoints; their rivers, roads, and ravines sealed through thick, sharp, and dense coils of concertina wire. The Indian discourse around Gurez represents it as peaceful compared to other parts of Kashmir, citing the non-existence of armed militancy in the region. At the same time, however, the military considers Gurez the hotbed of cross-border infiltrations, because of which the borders and the villages are heavily surveilled. In the village Tragbal in lower Gurez, where the residents are considered to be militant sympathizers, the ubiquitous presence of freshly fitted wooden planks in houses, I was told, indicated recent military operations to burn houses down in order to “flush out Pakistani militants.” Bandipora, too, unlike its pre-Partition days, when it was known as the center of fine arts, literature, and trade, had been deeply scarred by decades of violence in the 1990s when state-sponsored Ikhwan groups tasked with weakening the Kashmiri armed movement massacred people, raped and abducted women, and coerced people into acting as military spies and informants.

In such a context then, infrastructure was hardly “innocent” as it straddled the conflicting demands of design and security, restraint and movement, and instrumentality and politics (Lambert 2012). An important element of war, Leopold Lambert (2012: 16, 17) argues is movement: “he who maximizes movement and control[s] it leads the battle,” making the relationship between “architecture and circulation” in the “realm of military design” particularly close. While Lambert’s focus is predominantly on the free movement of military troops, the logic of efficient and speedier circulation applies as much to the transfer and movement of resources in an occupied territory, especially when the resource itself can be turned into an instrument of war. The quantity and speed of water gushing out of the HRT or its precision and timing are therefore as crucial for local communities as is the everyday movement of military personnel in their streets, towns, and villages. And people keep a close vigil. For them, if India’s capabilities to control Kashmiri territory through a dense network of infrastructure was a significant aspect of its occupational regime, so was its ability to control the flow and volume of water entering and exiting its rivers. The network of adits and tunnels, built deep inside the mountains, as well as the elaborate underground construction of

powerhouses, illustrates how Indian sovereignty “cuts through the landscape” and extends deep down into the riverbeds rather than limiting itself to the surface in Kashmir (Elden 2013: 3).

Within this context, the tunnel was not the natural byproduct of Kashmir’s geology but India’s purposefully designed tool to gain strategic advantage over its transboundary water wars with Pakistan. At the same time, recognizing that the conversation around national interests in India and Pakistan overrode Kashmiri interests, many Kashmiris foregrounded how the tunnel was dramatically altering the region’s landscape, boring holes through its mountains, killing various life-forms along the way, and irreversibly changing the course of its rivers. Kashmiri concerns about their damaged ecology, however, were not echoed by the geologists and engineers who spent their energies using cutting-edge design and technology to create what they truly believed was an “engineering marvel” that required “meticulous planning and precise execution.”⁸

“Erecting” a TBM

With a length of 23.65 kilometers, the Kishanganga’s HRT is the longest tunnel in Indian-controlled Kashmir. It was built using a combination of methods that included the traditional drill and blast method (DBM) and the cutting-edge tunnel boring machine (TBM). The TBM was designed especially by Italy’s underground excavation company, SELI, to make tunneling in the difficult geology of the Himalayas quicker and more efficient. The “nation’s socialist nature [had] made access to tunneling technology, [including the TBM’s] difficult,” remarks a blogger on *Swarajya*, a right-wing, pro-capitalist magazine in India. Therefore, for champions of the free market, the TBM was a spectacular face of India’s economic liberalization: while it embodied the Indian hopes and aspirations of competing zealously with Pakistan for the waters of the Kishanganga River, it also materialized the global business transactions that were rerouting a significant river system in the Himalayas. The HCC, the subcontracted construction company hired by the NHPC to build the Kishanganga dam, became the first in the world to have successfully used a TBM in the Himalayan region.

In HCC’s monthly brochure from 2014 devoted exclusively to the tunneling milestones in India and elsewhere, the HCC frames its accomplishment as an “encounter” between the “fragile, weak, and jointed rock masses of the Himalayas,” and the HCC’s “responsive and on the toes engineering and construction work.” Other promotional materials include a series of YouTube videos, one of which features a 29-year-old Italian engineer, Luca Jacomine, thrilled to be working in Kashmir, “one of the most remote places on earth.”⁹ In his excited, yet cautious remarks, he confesses that his family and friends think that he’s a “little crazy because of course, we are very close to the border, and there are political tensions with Pakistan.” But a voice-over abruptly diverts our attention to the difficult geography of Kashmir, ignoring its complex politics and the ways the tunnel both exacerbates these tensions and plays a part in accentuating transboundary water disputes between India and Pakistan. Foregrounding the material

and logistical “challenges” of working in Gurez, the voice-over claims that the crew will “have to work round the clock for over three years, pushing the men and machine to the limit.” Soon, the attention shifts once again to Jacomine, who appears, in the video, as a young pioneer. He, the voice-over states, is “everywhere,” making critical decisions regarding equipment, materials, and manpower and “taking charge of the camp where the international workers live and eat their meals.” His ubiquitous presence notwithstanding, the young engineer is shown to enjoy the international community of friends and associates from Argentina, Calabria, and the Philippines, a global community of pioneers who are all committed to the “brave” work of tunneling at 2,400 meters amidst severe challenges: “extreme weather conditions,” narrow mountain roads, and the possibility of losing their lives or getting severely injured by landslides caused by “loose rock and soil” from the mountains. Such romantic tales of hardiness and defiance, however, were punctured often with the gloom the workers and managers experienced during Gurez’s long and brutal winters. Idealized narratives of frontier romance were short-lived, and a fundamental challenge was that of retaining workers, especially the “skilled labor force,” most of whom came from outside Kashmir and found it difficult to labor in desolate conditions without access to electricity, phone connections, and decent food. Laboring inside tunnels with limited air and little-to-no exposure to sunlight was a far cry from the promised romance of working in Kashmir’s verdant landscapes. Indeed, most engineers and geologists had no doubts that the Kashmiri frontiers were spaces that could not be tamed through technology, surveys, or TBMs alone. They invoked tropes of luck and chance to express their vulnerability in the face of an “unpredictable and diverse” Himalayan geology.

Land frontiers challenged the smug assuredness of the scientific technical apparatus, which included surveys, maps, and drawings, even in the nineteenth century, when it was clear to colonial explorers that rendering the frontiers knowable would require more than a “standardized set of procedures” (Simpson 2017: 4). Indeed, “the extraordinary climatic conditions and perceptions of existential threats” far exceeded colonial scientific frames of understanding “these frontier” environments (ibid.: 2). In Kashmir, thus, the science of tunneling, as the TBMs had repeatedly demonstrated, was far from perfect. An engineer working in the tunneling industry for over 18 years explained to me the fickle personality of the Himalayan mountains: “one second, you have sedimentary rock and the next second, we are dealing with igneous rock.” The unpredictable geology of the Himalayan mountains became particularly salient during their TBM work, when the igneous rock pushed against the sedimentary rock, creating a weak interface, which had to be buttressed for future safety against potential earthquakes and other natural hazards. This caught the team by surprise because the weak interface appeared 500–600 meters before what was estimated by HALCRO, a global surveying company, a remarkable discrepancy that was both unusual and potentially devastating. Since it was hard to fault HALCRO with its global reputation for tunneling, the engineer blamed the existing *haalat* (political conditions) in Kashmir and the ensuing uncertainty that made the work of foreign companies even more

difficult. Notwithstanding its sophisticated technology and the political *haalat*, the TBM could only work if the rocks allowed it to, a “fundamental” geological fact for most engineers. To them, “the rock was the ultimate god” (also see Bauer and Bhan 2018).

After a history of TBM’s consecutive failures in the Himalayas, its first-time success in 2014 imbibed a newfound confidence in the engineers I spoke with. My initial interviews in 2012 were filled with stories of mountain tops collapsing on TBMs in Kashmir and elsewhere, tinged with a nagging worry that it could potentially meet a similar fate in Bandipora. In 2014, when the tunnel was nearing completion, the engineers were overjoyed. Their work had broken a jinx and established a new precedent for TBM’s success in the Himalayas (Goel 2014: 54). Excitedly, they would debate the TBM’s size and dimensions even though this information was commonly known and available in official HCC brochures. The engineers were awestruck that:

[T]he machine made everything so much more efficient: it drilled 42 meters in a day compared to the 3–4 meters of the traditional drilling and blasting method. It constructed the 14 kms of the Kishanganga tunnel in record time so while it was very expensive it was worth their time and money.

The TBM also helped the engineers defy the constraints of winter since they could continue the work inside the tunnel without exposing their workers and equipment to the frigid weather. Most importantly, for several managers of the HCC and the NHPC, the TBM helped them counter the fickle and capricious Kashmiri workers who were reluctant to work inside the tunnel. In a place then, where both people and landscapes were “wild,” “irrational,” and “unpredictable” and people “lazy and unwilling to work,” the TBM introduced a measure of rationality, predictability, and control (Bhan 2014). But at the same time, the engineers called the TBM a “demon,” because it “guzzled power. A 22 KW transformer was used for its operation and in an hour, it consumed 250 liters of diesel!” The biggest hurdle, most engineers agreed, was not that the machine’s operations were expensive. Instead, its transportation and installation as well as its size and complexity posed a bigger challenge. The hardest part, I was told,

[w]as to transport the machine to the Himalayas and then to “assemble and erect” it; it took the engineers six months of work to erect the machine in Bandipora and a month and a half to finally dismantle and store it.

In Kashmir, where the Indian military has long asserted its masculine presence, the use of sexualized language feminizes Kashmiri mountains and landscapes as state and military organizations frequently compare them with women’s bodies. For instance, the signage posted on the national highway by the Border Roads Organization (BRO) reminds drivers to lower their speeds on the difficult road that cuts through tedious mountain passes. Signs such as “be gentle on my curves” or those that remind us “neither [to] make love [nor] war

while driving” illustrate how state agencies deploy language to sexualize the Kashmiri landscape, an attempt to render it more seductive and, ultimately, less threatening. Ananya Jahanara Kabir has described the ways in which Kashmir, an “intensely desired” place in the Indian imaginary, is repeatedly drawn into India’s postcolonial libidinal economy through an array of cinematic and photographic representations (2009: 1, 14). The use of “erection,” to describe a technological installation therefore, seems only fitting in a context where the landscape is already feminized and tunnels represent the ultimate triumph of India’s masculine nationalism over Kashmir’s capricious (read sexualized) rivers and mountains.

At work here is what David E. Nye calls the “technological sublime” (1996), a sense of awesomeness and wonder, punctuated with terror or fear, which, he claims, is no longer confined to things natural but also attributed to spectacular works of engineering. Conceptions of the technological sublime, he argues, emerged in the middle of the nineteenth century in relation to American railroads, bridges, skyscrapers, and factories and became integral to the notions of self, democracy, and nation by bridging existing political divides among Americans, inducing in them a “sense of well-being” by emphasizing shared “political values of republicanism” over narrow sectarian and ideological divisions (1996: 35). The inauguration of the Erie Canal in October 1825 was precisely one of those earlier moments in the US history that “united the citizenry” despite their political differences; it “purified and uplifted the mind and helped individuals see themselves as members of a larger community” (1996: 34, 35). On the surface, tunnels perform similar political work in Kashmir, although, I will argue later, with perverse ends. For instance, celebrated as “Kashmir’s lifeline,”¹⁰ tunnels are meant to connect Kashmir against all geographical odds with the rest of India, making tunnels spectacular symbols of national and territorial integration. “No need to move mountains, just go through them now,”¹¹ claims a blog piece in *Swarajya*, celebrating the Patnitop tunnel on the Jammu and Kashmir highway, South Asia’s longest and fastest tunnel, as the “tunnel of hope,”¹² one that would establish “permanent connectivity” with Kashmir, and reduce the distance between Kashmir and India by around 30 kilometers.

Notwithstanding the transnational alliances that made such “infrastructural marvels possible,”¹³ Indian commentators presented tunnels in Kashmir as unequivocal declarations of Indian sovereignty over Kashmiri mountains and landscapes and celebrated them as such. For instance, on the inauguration day for the Patnitop tunnel, the Minister for Road Transport, connected the project to Modi’s “Make in India” campaign, while pictures of a confident and self-assured Modi, walking inside the tunnel, flaunting India’s newfound might, made rounds on India’s news channels and social media. The Kishanganga HRT, too, was marked and packaged as an Indian accomplishment. Promotional photos from the site proudly celebrated the “TBM breakthrough,” with a bunch of workers standing under an Indian flag, flanked on either side with posters from SELI and HCC, to showcase India’s transnational connections while at the same time honing in on India’s corporate and engineering ingenuity.

Inaugural ceremonies such as these generate narratives of “national” unity and pride; they are meant to cement the nation through gravel and concrete. River infrastructures, in particular in the South Asian context, have long been used as significant tools to forge state spaces as “homogeneous, integrated, and internally undifferentiated” even as nationalist politics ends up solidifying ethnic, regional, and religious hierarchies (Akhter 2015: 850). The Tarbela dam in Pakistan, for instance, used hydro infrastructure to counter the deepening divide between the Sindh and Punjab provinces of Pakistan in the 1960s (Akhter 2015: 857). Authoritarian governments relied on “natural geographical unit created by the Indus watershed” to further embolden Pakistan’s military-bureaucratic elite (Akhter 2015: 858).

On the Indian side, right-wing Hindu ideologues have used infrastructure and religious imaginaries in order to claim India’s rivers as “sacred” repositories of Hindu history. In such accounts, Indus represents the “power and permanence of [an] ancient Indian civilization,” and Sindhu, the “cradle of the Indus civilization,” a river system that “unites” India and stands testimony to its 5000-year-old civilization.¹⁴

Indeed, the Sindhu is “as holy as it is historical” they claim, to the extent that even the word Hindu is believed to be derived from Sindhu and represents a male warrior god. Peppered with claims about India’s indivisible and historic sacred geography are Indian right-wing anxieties regarding the Indus Waters Treaty. M. G. Chitkara, a lawyer, retired government official, and the author of numerous books, claims that for India, giving up full rights over the Western rivers, meant “in the popular mind,” that “India was giving up her ancient civilizational moorings known as the Indus Valley Civilization . . . and “mentally conceding the claim that this civilization [only] depicted the past of Pakistan” (2002: 276). Indeed, since Sind was no longer part of India and Sindhu now belonged to Pakistan, there were suggestions to “drop Sindhu” from India’s national anthem (Chitkara 2002: 275). Needless to say, the Indus or the Sindhu became an iconic symbol of the resurgence of right-wing Hindu forces in India in the 1990s, especially along the LoC where the river runs its course. With the BJP’s rise to power in 1996, there were attempts to explode this myth that Sindhu belonged only to Pakistan (2002: 276). In order to do this, the government organized elaborate annual rituals such as the Sindhu *darshan* that included pilgrimage to the Indus River in the Himalayas, an attempt to “rekindle the fond memories of pre-partition days when the Sindhu was very much an ‘Indian’ river” (Chitkara 2002: 276). Even the Prime Minister of India at the time, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, had invoked a hymn from the Rig Veda, describing the Sindhu as a “mighty river whose roar could be heard upto heaven [sic]” (Chitkara 2002: 161). Such efforts were aggressive bids to recast Indian geography as sacred and turn Kashmiri rivers into symbols of Hindu religious antiquity.

Alongside the use of explicit religiosity to claim the Sindhu as their own, dams, too, were meant to establish user rights over Western rivers of the Indus basin. For instance, Chitkara defiantly undermines Pakistani allegations of water theft by India, stating that “contrary to the general impression that the river has been

‘given away’ to Pakistan under the Indus Waters Treaty, India can still utilize the waters of this river” for both hydropower and irrigation. There are indeed legal sanctions inbuilt in the treaty which safeguard India’s consumptive rights over the Indus (Chitkara 2002: 277).

In a context where the Indus is considered a national river *qaomi dariya* in Pakistan and deified as a warrior-god in India, building dams on the Indus is meant to seal nationalist or sacred imaginaries through tropes of progress, unity, integration, and civilizational antiquity. Indeed, dam building represents precisely the “double action of the imagination” that Nye thinks is an important component of the technological sublime: while the Indus is “appropriated as [a] natural symbol of the nation,” in order to be fully claimed, however, it must first be “transformed” through cement, concrete, gravel, and human ingenuity (1996: 37). While tunnels, among other infrastructural interventions such as roads and highways, attribute a tangibility to India’s political rhetoric of “integrating” Kashmir with India, we must ask what moral and political work does the trope of integration perform for the Indian occupation? What precisely is being integrated and for what ends? And, what are the terms of this integration?

Mobilities and (im)mobilities

The Indian efforts to integrate Kashmir, be it through elections or infrastructure, is perceived by many in Kashmir as India’s persistent crisis of legitimacy in an occupied territory. Indeed, for many, integration is a benign way to loot Kashmiri rivers in order to power the Indian economy and manufacture Kashmir’s dependence on India so that claims to Kashmiri freedom can be presented as being irrational and untenable. For India, thus, most infrastructural investments, in the form of tunnels, roads, highways, and bridges, are meant to forcibly integrate Kashmiri populations with the Indian mainstream, with integration implying the free movement of capital and the normalization of India’s extractive economy in Kashmir. In a region where space remains visibly fragmented through a dense mesh of walls, wires, checkpoints, military camps, as well as through unfinished flyovers or strategically built bridges and roads, mobility or the lack thereof, is a persistent reminder of the many ways people consider themselves “unfree.” For instance, infrastructural interventions, particularly the HRT, meant for rerouting Kishanganga’s river waters, imposed forced immobilities on communities, especially in Gurez, where men and women could no longer access their pasturelands or their streams and *nulluhs*, while women were scared to venture out alone amidst “strangers from the HCC and the NHPC.” It was no wonder that the tunnel became a potent site to debate and foreground questions of integration, connectivity, and mobility for people who considered themselves already “trapped” in a mountain valley, whose only physical connection with the rest of the world was the dilapidated highway that remained closed for more than six months every year.

In his discussion of the connections between mobility, freedom, and conceptions of justice, Noel Salazar reminds us of how the organization of the world

into sovereign states shapes our fundamental views on the freedom of movement, a right guaranteed by Article 13 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which unequivocally declares everyone's right to the freedom of movement and residence, limiting it, however, to spaces that exist "within the borders of each state" (Salazar 2016: 284). Sovereign freedom thus "extends beyond the individual body" to include questions of power, governance, and legitimacy, as Sheller (2008: 30) argues, and hence the freedom to move is a persistently "scarce and unequally distributed commodity," especially in places that define the sovereign borders of nation-states (Bauman 1998; Salazar 2016: 286). Indeed, as Sheller rightly points out, it is precisely through "the regulation of mobilit[ies]" that borders and [border subjectivities] are [formed] and constituted (Sheller 2008: 4–5). But beyond meanings ascribed to it by sovereign states, mobility must also be "seen as part of a wider value systems" shaped in large part by people's histories and their memories of movement, stasis, and confinement (Salazar 2016: 285).

In Gurez, for instance, the network of adits and tunnels and the walls of gravel and concrete further reinforced state-controlled regimes of mobility. In a context where people's long-standing demand for an all-weather road tunnel had failed to stir the state, the HRT symbolized India's extractive politics in Kashmir and became quite literally the conduit through which Kashmiri resources were siphoned off to help India's growth and industry. Local villagers in Bandipora and Gurez who worked on the dam site and inside the tunnels complained about there being "tunnels inside tunnels," about an "unfamiliar world" that was fast disrupting their own. "Who knows where these tunnels lead and what or who they can carry," said a dejected older worker who worried that the tunnels were being built for strategic purposes and could potentially exceed their immediate use and intent.

But, above all, for communities in Gurez who remained cut off from rest of the state for seven to eight months during winter, the HRT was a persistent reminder of their "unfreedoms" and the priorities of the government, which willingly mobilized private and public investments to allow the uninterrupted flow of water but had repeatedly failed to generate enough finances for an all-weather road-tunnel. For the villagers thus the disconnections they experienced were not due to extreme weather alone. The LoC was a bigger impediment that prevented them from using roads and pathways that had crisscrossed the landscape before India and Pakistan blocked these in 1948. As far as one's sight permitted, one could see endless walls of concertina wires arbitrarily cutting across people's lands and their water bodies, preventing free movement of people and cattle and making it impossible for animals to graze or for communities to cultivate their land. The stories of their mangled cattle or bruised kids were common, and it angered the people that the wired border had been installed several feet before the officially designated LoC, for which the people faulted the Indian army's culture of incompetence and corruption.

Gurezis experienced their forced isolation as incarceration while their rivers, they claimed, were molded and re-rerouted, or bent at will, to act as weapons of war in an attempt to legitimize contested sovereignties. In a context where human

mobility was severely restricted both within and across the border, the desire to travel to Bandipora in the winter or connect or reintegrate with their lost kith and kin in Pakistan or reclaim their old Central Asian trade routes was a defining part of Gurezi social and political consciousness. Indeed, even as the fear of an imminent flood (*sehlab*) loomed large in Gurez, for some the damned river offered uncanny possibilities: Rehman, a young Gurezi man, told me how his father instructed him every night to hold on to his cherished belongings since the river could swell up without notice, exceeding the official estimates of the HCC, and transport them to Pakistan. Part fear, part fantasy, such imaginaries offered some hope that the damned river might eventually subvert territorial boundaries and restore previous connections between places and people. At the same time, Gurezis found tangible ways to resist the state's infrastructure that had transformed Gurez into a *pinjra* (cage). In the years leading up to the dam's inauguration, Gurezis repurposed the water tunnel (HRT) to use it for transport between Gurez and Bandipora, especially in the winter when Gurezis lose their connectivity with Kashmir. Albeit temporary, the repurposing of the HRT ended up energizing their long-standing demand for their fundamental right to be mobile.

Conclusion: the (*ajooaba*) spectacle of mobility

HCC completed building the HRT by 2014, a few months before the winter set in. Since other parts of the dam were still under construction, the company officials, under pressure from the local authorities, decided to open the tunnel for local communities so they could travel between Gurez and Bandipora in a trolley, a decision that eased the company's financial liability of running a winter helicopter service for Gurezis. Since walking through the tunnel was no easy feat and people had to climb into the mouth of the TBM to come out from the other end, only men were allowed to use the tunnel, at least initially. Many HCC officials I spoke with expressed their disdain "for the undisciplined crowds from Gurez" who gathered near the mouth of the tunnel every Sunday. An HCC worker stationed at the tunnel complained about how "the administration would issue forty to fifty passes to the locals but we would invariably find 400–500 people waiting in line to get into the tunnel. The police in cahoots with the politicians allows everyone." People here always have "an emergency," he said, with a hint of sarcasm.

After a while, we started recognizing their faces; many of them were shopkeepers who used the tunnel to transport fruit and vegetables from Bandipora to Gurez. It happened a few times and fights would break out between locals and the company officials.

In addition to these "annoyances," the officials resented that the locals were wasting the Company's time and resources and delaying the speedy completion of the dam. Indeed, a nagging worry for the officials was that Gurezis frequently threatened to close the tunnel, demanding "that the tunnel should carry people not their water or resources."

While most officials turned to benevolent registers of care to limit Gurezis from using the “tunnel too much,” citing how prone the tunnel was to “fatal accidents,” Gurezis objected to the HCC’s reluctance to ferry them across the tunnel. The HCC was blamed for “stealing their resources” and for damaging the roads in Gurez which the Company brazenly used to carry heavy loads, construction material, and equipment. While the helicopter services had been rare and infrequent, the “loco” that carried them inside the tunnel seemed more accessible even if it was “designed to carry machines and equipment” and was “terribly uncomfortable.”

For many Gurezis, the experience was nothing short of an *ajoooba*, (a spectacle) since it was “strange to walk inside the belly of the mountain and then climb into a machine.” As Munnavar, a middle-aged villager who had used the tunnel three times, described it, “when you came out of the mouth of the TBM from the other end of the tunnel, it was as if you were coming out of a womb, you were being born again.” The analogy of birthing here is critical insofar as it illustrates Gurezis’ abiding desire to reinvent themselves through sustained connections and mobilities, the absence of which, they claim, have forced them into a state of perpetual backwardness.

In subsequent months, the demands for better roads and tunnels became even more fervent even as people continued to remain critical of the dam and its devastating consequences for their land holdings and livelihoods, as well as for Gurez’s mountain ecology. But while the HRT embodied India’s extractive politics in Kashmir, Gurezis used it as a potent site to challenge as well as renegotiate new and old structures of immobility, policing, and confinement.

Notes

- 1 www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-to-expedite-3-projects-to-stop-its-share-of-indus-waters-from-flowing-into-pakistan/story-qj7xCE1V1IZ4tOoGHwFhJP.html
- 2 <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/modi-government-lays-groundwork-for-water-war-in-battle-with-rival-pakistan/articleshow/54936280.cms?from=mdr>
- 3 On August 5, 2019, the BJP government, headed by Narendra Modi, reorganized the state of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories and abrogated Articles 370 and 35A that had maintained Kashmir's semi-autonomous status in India. Considered an obstruction to Kashmir's integration with India, popular media framed the BJP government's unilateral decision as a bold step to correct a seven-decade-long blunder that had impeded Kashmir's growth and development and encouraged separatist sentiments in the Valley. The abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A in 2019 along with the introduction of a new domicile law in 2020 that withdrew Kashmiri permanent residency rights worsened Kashmiri fears about India's settler colonial agendas in the region. The new laws will allow Indians to purchase property in Kashmir and compete for jobs and scholarship, while transforming the demographic character of the region and displacing Kashmiris from their own land. BJP's larger political agenda was to erase Kashmir's international status as a disputed territory and weaken the Kashmiri Muslim demand for a self-determination through a plebiscite. The language of development, infrastructure growth, and political integration as pretexts for its sweeping and unilateral decisions has allowed the BJP to dress up its demographic war against Kashmiris as a humanitarian intervention. Since August 5, 2019, Modi's government has encouraged the speeding up of hydropower projects and invited non-Kashmiri investors from

- India to develop mega infrastructure such as military airports, Information Technology parks, roads and highway projects.
- 4 www.firstpost.com/india/infrastructure-mother-development-pm-modi-kashmir-1602843.html [Accessed 30 March 2015].
 - 5 www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/pm-narendra-modi-inaugurates-indias-longest-road-tunnel-chenaninashri-in-jammu-and-kashmir/article17762274.ece [Accessed 21 June 2017].
 - 6 <https://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/20915/1/Mirza%20PhD%20Dissertation%20for%20heiDOK.pdf> [Accessed 18 January 2018].
 - 7 Kashmir only receives 12% of the power share as royalty from the NHPC while the rest is diverted to India. Guerzis still draw their power from diesel generators are not connected to any power supply lines.
 - 8 www.dailyexcelsior.com/hcc-completes-14-75-km-tunnel-kishanganga-project-jk/ [Accessed 29 June 2016].
 - 9 www.youtube.com/watch?v=_bpyADtCGiE&t=7s [Accessed 6 March 2016].
 - 10 <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/why-this-tunnel-will-become-jammu-and-kashmirs-lifeline/articleshow/57937413.cms> [Accessed 24 August 2017].
 - 11 <https://swarajyamag.com/infrastructure/chenani-nashri-tunnel-no-need-to-move-mountains-just-go-through-them-now> [Accessed 25 August 2017].
 - 12 www.drivespark.com/off-beat/india-s-longest-road-tunnel-set-to-open-march-021070.html [Accessed 25 August 2017].
 - 13 <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/printrelease.aspx?relid=160240> [Accessed 2 June 2017].
 - 14 <http://hinduism.about.com/cs/festivals/a/sindhudarshan.htm> [Accessed 15 October 2015]. <http://edenkeeper.org/2014/10/01/india-sacred-rivers> [Accessed 15 October 2015].

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7 Narratives from exile

Kashmiri Pandits and their construction of the past

Mridu Rai

Beginning in January 1990, such large numbers of Kashmiri Pandits – the community of Hindus native to the valley of Kashmir – left their homeland and so precipitously that some have termed their departure an exodus. Indeed, within a few months, nearly 100,000 of the 140,000-strong community had left for neighbouring Jammu, Delhi, and other parts of India and the world.¹ One immediate impetus for this departure in such dramatically large numbers was the inauguration in 1989 of a popularly backed armed Kashmiri insurgency against Indian rule. This insurrection drew support mostly from the Valley's Muslim population. By 2011, the numbers of Pandits remaining in the Valley had dwindled to between 2,700 and 3,400, according to different estimates. An insignificant number have returned.

This rupture necessitated explaining it in order to survive it. An upheaval so momentous could only be thought of collectively and comprehended in terms of a grander pattern, not on the trivial scale of the individual and the immediate. This essay focuses on some revelatory fragments of the collective memory some members of the Pandit community – those in better positions to 'tell' – have constructed since their exile. A few caveats informing this study are in order. Most important is the understanding that a collective memory is an ideological and affective fiction. It masks the historical reality that in fact communities do not 'remember' collectively, democratically or uniformly. Within them, there are divergent understandings of the past with some members appropriating the right to shape what and how others must remember. Indeed, the struggle to iron out creases by conjuring a single collective past is a vital part also of constructing the community itself in specific historical contexts. The idea of a collective past also assumes the continuous, unchanging existence of the remembering community. In fact, neither the community (or community identity) nor its relationship with the past is beyond historical process.²

However, although there may be no collective past reflecting a collectively remembering Pandit community, the effort to conjure one bears examining. Their 'exodus' from the Valley after 1990 provides the immediate context for the particular evocations of the past by Kashmiri Pandits that are examined here. This study's focus is on the writings of some of those Pandits who have been privileged enough to have their stories be heard. It does not address those produced

by members of other Kashmiri communities. This is because it is those Pandits' accounts of events, especially those related to or with implications for the insurgency, that have been privileged in mainstream Indian political discourse as legitimate narrations. Their stories provide usable pasts for policy-making vis-à-vis the movement for *azadi* (freedom) that has stirred mostly Muslims in Kashmir. Pandit portrayals of a Hindu utopia destroyed as well as their accounts of victimization have become expedient instruments for the state's deflecting attention away from widespread popular protests in the Valley and focusing instead on the suppression of what is widely generalized as a radicalized Islamic violence-driven sedition. Paradoxically, whereas most of the exiled Pandits may find themselves relatively disenfranchised today, their narratives, on the other hand, have come to be intertwined with power.

Many of the Pandit tales from exile examined here prompt troubling conclusions. As elaborated in the following pages, in narrating their past, such Pandit accounts have not sought merely to explain their dislocation but have gone on to inculcate their more numerous Muslim co-regionalists for causing it or allowing it to happen. The Pandit exile has implications beyond the undoubtedly tragic ones for them; Kashmir's Muslims also feel the repercussions gravely. Yet, few of the Pandits' recollections reproduced here reflect any awareness of this shared dilemma. In constructing a collective past, they have also constructed an exclusionary past.

This compels consideration of a question, uncomfortable to ask about any displaced people, but forced by the nature of the polemic examined in this essay: how much responsibility do some Pandits bear, at least in their rhetoric, for their own excision from Kashmir? This essay argues that the various themes through which some Pandits have reshaped their past – such as primordiality, intellectual and cultural exemplariness, religious persecution, political victimization – are intended to bolster their superior entitlement to Kashmir at a time when their grasp over it seems to be slipping. They do this at the expense of the majority Muslim population of Kashmir and by looking to those with power in India to shore up their own.

The exodus

Explaining the departure of Pandits is an ideological minefield. Some have attributed it entirely to the machinations of the Indian government, specifically by Jagmohan, its appointed governor in the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) at the time. He allegedly encouraged non-Muslims in Kashmir to leave, making arrangements for their exit, so as to clear the ground for military action against 'terrorists' without the risk of collateral damage to Hindus. Others speak of calls issued from mosques, announcements in newspapers, and of posters and pamphlets distributed by Islamist groups who threatened to kill non-Muslims who would not leave.

There can be no single explanation for the Pandits' leaving their homeland in the Valley. The different reasons will remain mired in controversy until there can

be a careful sifting of disputed facts and memories at variance – a tall order in a war zone. However, that so many Pandits left their homeland so quickly belies suggestions that this ‘exodus’ was entirely voluntary. It seems reasonable to say that many Pandits left because of a clear sense they had gained that they, their families, and their futures were no longer safe in Kashmir.

The human rights monitor Asia Watch documented several instances of militant groups continuing to threaten Hindus in Kashmir, including Pandits, even after the bulk of the latter had left the Valley.³ And then there were several gruesome massacres by militants of Pandits – including women and children – who had remained in the Valley, deep in its rural interiors: seven were killed in Sangrampora village (21 March 1997), twenty-three in Wandhama village (25 January 1998), and twenty-four in Nadimarg (23 March 2003). Such acts attenuated the Pandits’ already frail sense of security.

According to the Indian home ministry’s annual report for 2009–10, 20 years after the exodus, there were 57,863 Pandit refugee families, of whom 37,285 resided in Jammu, 19,338 in Delhi, and 1,240 in other parts of the country.⁴ Countless writers have described the miserable conditions of the Pandits living in camps, especially those who are still languishing in those established in and around Jammu. Unwelcomed by their host communities, entirely deprived of privacy and basic amenities, many succumbed to depression, ageing-related diseases, and a sense of desperate helplessness. Needless to say, there were some who fared better – those with wealth and older connections – but for those many others with none of these advantages it was as being plunged with no safety net. Ever since 1990, Indian politicians promised much and delivered next to nothing for the camp-dwellers. The camps – and their later concrete avatars – became dynamic sites for the construction of a collective past. As individual memories were pooled and tales of horror shared, one story began to merge into another. The past was reshaped to make the present more explicable.

‘First Peoples’ and the ownership of Kashmir

In the opening pages of his memoir of growing up in exile, the Kashmiri Pandit journalist Rahul Pandita speculates that his ancestors may have come to the Valley from the plains of Punjab. His mention of arrival immediately triggers mention of the community’s forced departures yet to come. As Pandita tells us, his forebears of antiquity ‘took the same route to enter Kashmir as their future generations took many times to escape from there, mostly due to religious persecution’.⁵ The inflection of his memoirs is, therefore, made apparent at the very outset. Informed by his community’s recent displacement from Kashmir, he will remember for us their long history of victimization by Muslims. Pandita’s book is fairly typical of the genre of ‘memories’ produced by a number of Pandits with the privileged position – born partly from their access to Western-style education – to narrate their versions of their departures. They identify their present community in unbroken continuity with the Valley’s ‘aborigines’, a term that has gained wide currency among them. This allows them to stake their prior claim to the Valley and, by a

rhetorical sleight of hand, turn Muslims into outsiders. Thus, Pandita asserts ‘his’ community’s ownership of Kashmir by appropriating its oldest traditions. It was ‘my’ ancestors who made the Valley ‘home’, weaving the myth around the geological formation of the valley from a lake. It was ‘our’ deities who intervened with demons to make it habitable.⁶

Going strictly by surviving literary evidence, however, the first available expression of the origin myth of Kashmir comes from a Buddhist tradition. The *Mulasarvastivadavinaya*, perhaps compiled in the first or second CE in northwest India,⁷ includes like other *vinayas* (monastic codes) not only a detailed set of rules for monks to live by but is also replete with narrative tales. One such story tells of how Madhyandina – who was either a disciple or a companion of Ananda, himself the Buddha’s disciple – overpowered Huluta, the Naga (serpent-deity) guarding the land. Madhyandina then settled humans there, introduced Buddhism, and gave them the precious saffron crocus that helped them thrive. A detail added later made the valley a lake before Madhyandina’s intervention.

By contrast with the Sarvastavadin tradition, Alexis Sanderson tells us ‘there is no firm evidence in Kashmir of activity in the Hindu domain until the Gupta era (c. 300–600 CE) when ‘the region became open to cultural influences from the South’. A brahmanical variant of the origin myth of Kashmir, complete with a lake, a holy personage and a demon, becomes available in the *Nilamata Purana* – a Kashmiri-origin purana composed in the seventh century – that bears close resemblance to that of the Buddhist tradition. There is a context-appropriate substitution of the major actors: the demon Jalodbhava replaces Huluta; he is felled by Vishnu with the assistance of Sankarshan and Shiva; the gods intercede when invoked by the sage Kashyap; the lake acquires a name, Satisaras; the valley is settled with a ‘Hindu’ population brought from various countries and is protected by Nila, the lord of the Nagas.⁸ The broad strokes of the origin myth in the *Nilamata Purana* also passed into Kalhana’s twelfth-century *Rajatarangini*.⁹

And versions of the same myth of creation continued to be retold in the centuries after, owned as a common inheritance even by those who converted to Islam. As Chitralekha Zutshi shows, these origin stories travelled through Sanskrit texts, Persian narratives, and Kashmiri oral traditions, each inserting their own ideas of the universal world into which the locality of Kashmir, given definition through its sacred landscape, was plugged. Thus, the unknown author of the late sixteenth-/early seventeenth-century *Baharistan-i Shahi* also refers to the origin of the Valley in the desiccation of a lake. Allowing for the author’s Islamic faith, the story is a direct rendering of the creation myth in the Sanskrit texts but with Allah interceding through three angels to drain the lake.¹⁰

Needless to say, given the evidence from such remote times is by nature fragmentary and nebulous, there is nothing to suggest that the legend preserved in the *Mulasarvastivadavinaya* was not itself an appropriation of myths circulating even earlier. The versions in Persian chronicles were certainly unapologetically indebted to earlier Kashmiri traditions. The more important point is that it is difficult – if not impossible – to extrapolate ownership of a myth, and consequently

the territory it inhabits, from the available sedimentary layers in which it existed and through which it survived.

Anointing cultural exemplars

According to Rahul Pandita, his putative ancestors all took to ‘the pursuit of knowledge’ making Kashmir ‘the primeval home of the Brahmins, or *Brahmans* – those who are *conscious*’.¹¹ He reiterates a common Pandit self-assessment that they have represented the acme of intellectual achievement for centuries. It is no doubt with some justification that they celebrate several personages who made timeless contributions to the literary and philosophical wealth of older India. However, in hailing them Pandits assume that inspiration dried up and creativity disappeared once ‘their’ days of cultural splendour were over, specifically when Islam ‘arrived’ in the Valley.

Uncountable numbers of Pandits repeat the trope of their community having produced India’s greatest historian in the twelfth-century figure of Kalhana. His *Rajatarangini* is described as ‘among the world’s most extraordinary historical works’.¹² Those making such assessments show little awareness that they are merely reproducing a biased colonial historiography steeped in Orientalism and a specifically European understanding of what constituted history. The early nineteenth-century Indologist, H. H. Wilson, wrote approvingly in 1825: ‘The only Sanskrit composition yet discovered, to which the title of History can with any propriety be applied is the *Rajatarangini*’. But this was qualified praise. Wilson had limited his frame of comparison to works in Sanskrit. Further on, he stated that what made works such as the *Rajatarangini* more ‘extraordinary’ – in their attentiveness to their native region’s history – was the ‘contrast it affords to the total want of historical enquiry in any other . . . countries peopled by Hindus’. And it was because so little was known about India’s history preceding Muslim rule that works such as Kalhana’s ‘acquires an importance, not otherwise derived from the value of the record itself’. In his summing up of the work, moreover, Wilson dismissed the *Rajatarangini* for dealing with the ‘local transactions of “a petty state” that are neither in themselves, nor in their effects upon their neighbours, of any magnitude or importance’.¹³ The perils of selectively appropriating the appraisals of colonial writers are amply evident.

Another colonial/Europeanist historiographical idiosyncrasy – evident in Wilson’s account – adopted unthinkingly by many Pandit and other Indian writers is the assumption of Hindu and Muslim eras in history. Exalting the *Rajatarangini* went hand in hand with a belief that the greatest days of historical production ended with the ebbing of the presumed Hindu era.

Chitralekha Zutshi’s work, by contrast, brings out the continuing richness of historical traditions in Kashmir. She reveals how later Persian works interleaved with the earlier Sanskrit ones, being ‘actively engaged with them in claiming and redefining the tradition of historical composition in Kashmir’. And both strands were in constant conversation with popular storytelling traditions in Kashmiri.¹⁴ A sense of space and of a people continued to emerge from this intricate circuitry

of understanding the past through the interwoven linguistic mediums of Sanskrit, Persian, and Kashmiri.

Despite evidence of such intermeshing, many Kashmiri Pandit recollections of their past centre on their putative ancestors' prowess in Sanskrit as the civilizing language *par excellence*. This exclusive and timeless identification with a high Sanskrit tradition of course runs into difficulty; history, by the hand of the German linguist Georg Bühler, inconveniently discloses that by the late nineteenth century at least – if not much earlier – most Kashmiri Brahmans had long ceased using Sanskrit and only a few even seriously studied it.¹⁵ This endangered the myth of unbroken cultural continuity linking the Pandits of today to the Brahmans of the past.

K. N. Dhar attempts to provide salvage by arguing that his ancestors' culture was, in fact, transmitted down to his own time in a language supposedly unadulterated by the Muslim foreigners' Persian – i.e. Kashmiri. According to Dhar, beginning in the fourteenth century, even as Sanskrit was lost and Persian became 'the order of the day', the Shaivite mystic 'Lalleshwari chose to speak to the people in their own idiom; hence Kashmiri became the vehicle of her message'. In doing so she stepped in to save 'Kashmiri culture from being eroded and bruised'.¹⁶ Such a perspective assumes Kashmiri was not the language of the Valley's Muslims or a bearer of their traditions, too. What is more, it forgets that for many Pandits their survival and even efflorescence through the centuries of Muslim, Sikh, and most of Dogra rule owed in no small measure to their acquired proficiency in Persian. Their skills in the lingua franca of the courts not just in Kashmir but also elsewhere in India allowed them to prosper in various administrative capacities over the centuries. In their own state of Jammu and Kashmir, it was they who were hit particularly hard when its Dogra rulers switched the official language from Persian to Urdu in 1889.¹⁷

Paradise snatched

The gods grew envious of Kashmir, of its beauty, and of the artistic and scholarly accomplishments of its civilization-bearing Pandits.¹⁸ Divine resentment was manifested in the visitation of disease, earthquakes, floods, famines, and fires. Besides these, a succession of vicious rulers assailed Kashmir: the psychopathic Hephthalite king Mihirakula, the bloodthirsty iconoclast Sultan Sikander, the bigoted Shia Chaks, the intolerant Aurangzeb, the Hindu-baiting Afghans, the Dogras who became the pretext for Kashmiri Muslims to harass the Pandits, and then Sheikh Abdullah who incanted, 'Be one among us, flee, or be decimated'.¹⁹ Driving such narration is a deliberately construed historical pattern that hints at the worst that is yet to come: the alleged Islamist terror that finally drove them out of their homeland. 'Mahommedan oppression' – Georg Bühler's characterization – had destroyed the civilizational splendour the Pandits had built those hundreds of years ago; it was doing so again.

There is a conspicuous resonance of these themes in the writings also of a number of modern-day Sanskritists, historians, and scholars of ancient Kashmiri

religions. Like the Orientalists of old, an admiration for the ancient period leads many to perceive what followed – already classified as the Muslim period – as an inexorable decline. Alexis Sanderson, Walter Slaje, and Michael Witzel, inter alia, place Kashmiri Hindus/Pandits within the framing narrative of an interregnum of Muslim tyranny, which they then connect with the recent insurgency. According to them, the period of greatest vitality in Kashmiri religious and cultural development was the ‘pre-Islamic’. And then it is as if the lamps are snuffed out with the onset of Muslim rule. Writing in the early twenty-first century, Witzel looks back on the history of Kashmir’s Brahmins as of living through cycles of ‘calm’, ‘harassment’, and ‘stretches of actual persecution’ causing many to escape from the Valley, ‘just as they have had to do again in a mass exodus over the last decade’.²⁰ According to Sanderson, Kashmiri Hinduism had ‘limped into the 20th century, much reduced, but still alive’. He expressed uncertainty, however, about the future of this ‘cultural and religious identity’, as the Pandits had been forced out by a ‘recrudescence of communal disharmony’ since 1989 that has even challenged their ‘very status as Kashmiris’.²¹ Sanderson has reverted to outdated Orientalist stereotypes of Islam. And he seems unaware of an equally pertinent history of Pandit challenges to the status of Muslims as Kashmiris.

Slaje goes the furthest in allowing his otherwise unexceptionable scholarship to devolve into anti-Muslim activism: he appended to one of his essays a copy of a United States Congress resolution of 2006 moved by Representative Frank Pallone that alleges, among other things, that Pandits have been subjected to ethnic cleansing.²² Such perspectives are not just ahistorical, but they set off distorted searches for a chimerical golden age and find a reason for its end in the temptingly simplistic explanation of power lost to an intolerant faith. Works like these both reflect and in turn strengthen exclusionary Kashmiri Pandit narratives in a two-way exchange characteristic of the production of colonial knowledge by European Indologists.

A recent work by the historian Shonaleeka Kaul excavates Kashmir’s early history to reach a conclusion that, while not exactly the same, has similar repercussions for thinking about Muslims in Kashmir. ‘Where did Kashmir stand culturally’, she asks, ‘long, long before it was engulfed by the late 20th-century sectarian politics’?²³ As the title of the chapter in which she addresses this question most directly makes clear, her aim is not simply to locate but to ‘(re)locate early Kashmir’. Kaul concludes, through her reading mainly of the *Rajatarangini* and, to a lesser extent the *Nilamata Purana*, as well as a thin examination of what she terms ‘material culture’, that ‘the choices early Kashmir made that shaped its cultural identity and location were based on a very open and active, if uneven, historical interface with surrounding cultures’. Of these adjoining cultures, Kaul sees a personified Kashmir choosing to be conjoined to only one: ‘It came to master elements of one of those cultures’, she says, which was ‘the Indic’. Through this ‘interface’, Kaul argues ‘Indic civilization, in turn, drew on Kashmir’s learning and traditions to such a degree as to assign a centrality to Kashmir within the regional configuration in which it was situated’.²⁴

While part of her effort to re-locate Kashmir is in order to challenge views of the region as isolated/insular/peripheral,²⁵ it is also driven by the urge to correct approaches in which 'Kashmir is culturally thought to belong instead to a different regional formation altogether, one which . . . was non-Himalayan and non-Indic in the main . . . to what is increasingly now called the Indo-Iranian borderlands, the Indus-Oxus orbit or the Kabul-Gandhara complex'.²⁶ So, even while she acknowledges that the political domain of early Kashmir witnessed the 'incursion' of powerful dynasties drawn from outside the Indic realm – such as the Indo-Greeks, Saka, Pehlava, Kushanas, and Hunas – she insists we remember that 'these central Asian dynasties themselves came to be heavily Indicized'.²⁷ In her zeal to stitch the Valley tightly and solely to the Indic world, Kaul constricts not just these dynasties but also Kashmiris into a straightjacket. It could not be anyone's argument that Kashmiris did not partake of and contribute to the world she identifies as the Indic, but surely Kashmiris lived in many worlds through history. And the 'Indicized' Kushanas, the Hunas and the various other incursive ruling groups she mentions did not suddenly stop paying attention to the regions that lay to their northwest, in west and central Asia, or even to China, either in terms of political, military, religious, commercial, or cultural 'entanglements' when playing their part on the Indian subcontinent. To be or not to be Indic cannot have been a zero-sum game nor exclusive links to that 'supra-region' have been set for all time. For Kaul, however, that seems to be the case. What Kaul does demonstrate persuasively is how Kalhana, the author, was both steeped in Kashmir as well as being thoroughly embedded in the Indic world. But to expand Kalhana into all Kashmir and all Kashmiris is perhaps overdoing it.

In binding Kashmir to India (for that, at the end of the day, is what Indic entails in her work) and uncoupling its many links with other parts of the world, there appears to be another underlying narrative and an alternative purpose for Kaul's study. A series of statements in the book are revelatory. For instance, Kaul finds in the nineteenth-century politico-cultural performances of their role as Hindu rulers by the Dogra maharajas of Jammu and Kashmir an unbroken link with 'long and ancient . . . royal practices in Kashmir' described in the *Rajatarangini*. She sees in these acts an exercise in 'restoration' by the Dogra rulers, 'after six centuries of an Islamic rule hiatus', as opposed to a process of deliberate modern 're-imagination' as argued by others. To suggest re-imagination, Kaul asserts, would be 'to naturalize Kashmir as Islamic, which is certainly true of the 19th century but hardly of Kashmiri history in the *longue durée*'. Kaul is wary about perspectives that 'do not seem to address the implications of centuries of Islamization of the Valley from the 14th century onwards'.²⁸ Indeed, in explaining the necessity for her own work, she argues that the inadequacy of 'serious discursive scholarship on the ancient past of this troubled land' has meant that 'historical analysis of modern Kashmir, too . . . has tended to operate in virtually a vacuum, sometimes naturalizing the vitiated present'.²⁹ The result has been that the 'claims of a regional identity based on a single religion for contemporary Kashmir are proffered'.³⁰

Taking these assertions together, in the end, then, Kaul's is an examination of Kashmir's past not on its own terms but to serve the present; the debates engendered by the social fracture in Kashmiri society in the context of the insurgency have spilled over into such revisions of history. In the process, Kaul makes several ahistorical contentions. One is that a pristine Indic Kashmir of ancient times, travelling through centuries in unchanged form, retained its immediacy and relevance in the present; so much so that historians examining the modern period who do not pay heed to this are condemned to produce histories in 'a vacuum'. This frozen past was briefly 'restored' by the Dogras and then displaced in contemporary times by the purveyors 'of a regional identity based on a single religion'. Not to put too fine a point on it, it is claims made by many Kashmiri Muslims to Kashmir that are under challenge in this work, especially those making calls for separation, independence, or autonomy from India. Such political demands, on which she imposes a purely religious motivation, go against the grain of Kaul's version of history according to which 'in the *longue durée*' Kashmir can neither be 'naturalized' as Islamic nor be thought of separately from India. It was, in the long term, Indic; moreover, it was Indic in the specific manner exemplified by the *Rajatarangini* – engrained in the sphere of Sanskrit kavyas, shastras, the Puranas, the Epics and their wider moral and political codes.

The many Brahmins of Kashmir

Contemporary Kashmiri Pandits assert that they are all descended from the ancient Sarasvat Brahmins, one of several groups, defined broadly territorially, into which that caste divides itself. As their name indicates, Sarasvats associate themselves with the river Saravasti – the sacred river that disappeared aeons ago. By the late twentieth century, however, Pandits had pruned their caste identity further: they distinguished themselves from other Sarasvats asserting that those of Kashmir derived their subdivision's name not from the river but from the homonymous Hindu goddess of learning.³¹ The chronologically most proximate source in our times for the idea of Pandits constituting a tight-knit uniform group is Georg Bühler's lengthy report on his search for Sanskrit manuscripts in Kashmir (and elsewhere) in 1875. But what Bühler had conveyed merely as his Pandit informants' claim has travelled from then on as undisputed sociological reality.³²

Alexis Sanderson reveals a much more diverse picture of Kashmir's Hindus, albeit confining his discussion to the Brahmins of the Valley. As he argues, our scepticism about a monolithic Brahmin community in the past should arise from the origin myth in the *Nilamata Purana* alone, which tells of the settling in Kashmir, once it had been made liveable, of 'men from various lands'.³³ He discusses Brahmin immigrations in different periods and from different regions, mentioning a local Sanskrit source that listed the Sarasvats as only one among six groups named by place of origin. Others were the Maithilas, Kanyakubjas, Dravidas, Gaudas, and Gurjaras.³⁴ Remarkably, Bühler attests that the 'remembrance' of 'this separate origin' survived into his own time; one Kashmiri Brahmin he met

in 1875 said he still ‘possessed proofs of his ancestors having come from Gauda [modern-day Bengal]’.³⁵

And Sanderson’s evidence shows that the arena of Hindu religious ritual and worship was dynamic as late as in the seventeenth century, i.e. well into the so-called Muslim period. He speaks of the immigrant Maithil Kauls infusing into Kashmiri Shaktism their own eastern Indian elements. A leading exponent of Kaul traditions was Sahib Kaul (1642–1667+) whose writings demonstrate well the transition at work. Sanderson tells us that while his *Paddhatis* (ritual manuals) guiding worship of goddesses reflect the east Indian Shakta tradition in ‘pure form’ – that is without any trace of Kashmiri Shaivite ‘thought and language’ – Sahib Kaul’s other works reveal ‘the determination of these immigrants to be assimilated into the culture they had entered’. So even as he propitiated goddesses of the ‘eastern set’, he innovated by adopting the Kashmiri deity Sharika as his lineage goddess. Sanderson mentions at least three other works from the ‘late medieval period’ that integrate within a single Shakta pantheon the goddesses of the east and those of Kashmir. These ongoing processes of amalgamation signify socio-religious boundaries still in flux, not a fully formed community that had existed unaltered since the desiccation of the lake.

There is a difference between the phenomena, on the one hand, of Kashmiri regional traditions gradually overlaying varied Brahman religious practices and, on the other, the emergence of a single homogenous community of Brahmans. Indeed, Bühler, among others, describes a small community that was nevertheless internally differentiated along hierarchical lines. Of course, his information came from a minuscule pool of not disinterested informers; since his reason for being in Kashmir was to collect Sanskrit manuscripts, the Brahmans he interacted with most closely were those associated with that language tradition. But it was in conversation with Bühler – who was imbued with a colonial determination to abstract a tidy classification of people from a messier reality – that a depiction of Pandit society came to be formalized.

Imposing almost geometrical order, Bühler divided the community into the two halves of an ‘aristocracy’ and a ‘common herd’. The ‘aristocracy’ was subdivided further. They included a ‘small number of particularly respected families’ devoted to the study of Sanskrit who also officiated as chief priests at Shaiva temples, in domestic worship, and at *shradhas* (ceremonies to honour dead ancestors). Other so-called aristocrats included those Brahmans who had switched from functioning primarily in Sanskrit to Persian and whose occupations were those of officials and wealthy merchants. The ‘plebs’, below them, comprised the *Bacha-Bhattas* (domestic priests who performed manual services at ceremonies or served as copyists) and the even lowlier priests who served at pilgrimage sites.³⁶ Sanderson includes more groups among the inferior priests. The hierarchy among the priests was determined broadly by whether they were attached to temples or to families – the former being considered inferior.³⁷ And studying late twentieth-century Kashmir, T. N. Madan adds more names to our lexicon and more categories. He confirms Bühler’s and Sanderson’s observations of a hierarchically divided community and, according to him, by this later period, the *karkuns*, who followed

secular occupations and commanded greater economic power, had 'arrogated to themselves the higher position' among Pandits.³⁸

Georg Bühler had made a particular point of ascertaining whether the Pandits 'formed one single community'. Armed with a checklist generated by a specifically colonial sociology, he found Pandits passed the test of 'equality' on the practice of commensality and on their willingness to impart teaching to each other. On the third item – that of connubiality – Bühler encountered confusion. His interlocutors' first response was an unequivocal statement that the Sanskrit-oriented and Persian-oriented Pandits did not intermarry. However, upon more careful reflection, they recalled instances where such marriages had occurred; they qualified their first responses accordingly. But they still 'denied most emphatically' any marital association with the group Bühler calls the 'plebs'.³⁹ In these responses lay an indication of the fluidity, as late as in the late nineteenth century, in his Pandit informants' understanding of what constituted their community.

How does one sort the welter of collectivities emerging from the evidence to determine who the ancestors were of today's Kashmiri Pandits? The answer is that one does not. That genealogy is a contrivance that is both necessary to and a by-product of fashioning a collective memory. There was, in the end, no continuous remembering community; that community and its past, as evoked, were given life in exile.

The fragmented exodus

It became imperative to imagine a united community after the exodus. This required glossing over both historical evidence and contemporary reality. Indeed, many stories of their departures from the Valley demonstrate the absence/break-down of unity even in their manner of leaving. Pandit recollections speak of neighbours stealing away, their flight discovered only weeks later,⁴⁰ and of families finding relatives had left without a word, making their own separate arrangements. Yet another fissure that emerged through the exodus was that between those who left and those who remained. Pandit refugees reshaping their community's memories as an old rift pitting them against a Muslim monolith find it difficult to assimilate this internal barrier. It disrupts their narrative of an ethnic cleansing of their community. But, as Azad Essa points out, it is 'Pandits outside Kashmir [who] have dominated the narrative, while those inside have remained largely silent'.⁴¹

Among those who stayed on is Sanjay Tickoo who heads the Kashmiri Pandit Sangharsh Samiti (Committee for the Kashmiri Pandits' Struggle). He had experienced the same threats as the Pandits who left. Yet, though admitting 'intimidation and violence' directed at Pandits and four massacres since 1990, he rejects as 'propaganda' stories of genocide or mass murder that Pandit organizations outside the Valley have circulated. For all that, Tickoo does not peddle myths of some utopia of communal harmony between Muslims and Pandits existing now or before 1989. He speaks of a distinct embittering of relations between the two communities when the insurgency began. 'And these shifting sentiments', he says

‘were used by politicians on both sides, helping to stoke fear among the Hindu minority’.

Motilal Bhat, a headmaster and the president of the Pandit Hindu Welfare Society established in the mid-1990s to restore ties between Pandits and Muslims, also chose to stay back in Kashmir. He insists that both communities were equally guilty of chauvinism. Pandits like him are strikingly reluctant to claim any heroism in not leaving Kashmir. As Bhat put it, ‘we thought we’d watch events play out and then take it on a week to week basis. But these became months and then years’. This low-key assertion contrasts markedly with the tone of extreme umbrage in which Rahul Pandita writes about the Pandits who stayed. ‘Another untruth that leaves me fuming’, he says, ‘is the assertion that nobody touched the handful of Pandit families that had chosen to remain in the Valley’.⁴² Consciously or otherwise, Pandita has appropriated the right to speak on behalf of those of his community still in Kashmir, ignoring their own more textured stories.

Bhat is clear-eyed about how the exiles view Pandits like him. He says that in the early 1990s those who stayed on in Kashmir were maligned by those who left; ‘they “felt betrayed by the families who stayed behind” as if their continued presence in the valley undermined the experiences of those who had fled to difficult conditions in Jammu’. Perhaps, the harshest aspect of the transformed relations between those who left and those who stayed is a form of ostracism exercised on the latter by the former. Tickoo speaks of a ‘stigma’ attaching to the children of those who remained, especially to their daughters, for having lived in the Valley through the troubles. ‘On the one hand, they [the exiles] are afraid to send their daughters, while on the other, they say things like our daughters’ chastity has been torn by Muslim men’.⁴³ If one were to apply Bühler’s test of connubiality, a new fracture has opened up among Pandits.

The two sides of 19 January 1990

‘The attitudes of the Muslim neighbours have transformed overnight into one of suspicion and hostility’, declared Kundan Lal Chowdhury about the fateful night of 19 January 1990. ‘The macabre happenings’ on that night, he added, ‘have proved to be the turning point in the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits’.⁴⁴ This boilerplate had gained such currency that even Nikhil Koul, who had been a mere three-and-a-half years old at the time, could ‘never forget the horrifying events of the night . . . There were slogans everywhere. People were screaming that Kashmir would be free from India. Pandits were being attacked’.⁴⁵ Leaving aside the remarkable recall by one so young, it is difficult to understand how such a momentous transformation could have occurred ‘overnight’. The reluctance to acknowledge a longer history of drifting relations between Kashmir’s Muslims and Pandits exculpates Pandits from any responsibility for the divisions that have riven the Kashmiri society. They become the hapless victims of an irrationally enraged majority besetting them without provocation.

A certain Nelsonian ocularity characterizes many Pandit discussions of the night of 19 January 1990. According to R. N. Kaul, at around 10:30 p.m., there

suddenly broke a loud clamour of announcements emanating from the minarets of mosques in Srinagar. They urged people to take shelter in mosques immediately because 'army searches were going on'. 'Conditions are very bad', the speakers warned, 'save yourselves or you will be massacred'. Kaul's account describes the terror that gripped his community. Muslims who gathered close to the mosques were confused and no one 'knew what the matter was'. In the general panic, the 'whole Muslim population of the entire valley was on the roads. The announcements did not end. Fear spread throughout Kashmir'. Pandit families with telephones called relatives and friends in other parts of the Valley only to find the same situation prevailing everywhere. On the following morning 'no Pandit dared ask his Muslim friend or neighbour what the matter was. Muslims maintained silence'. And so 'Pandits lost all trust that they reposed in Muslims' and began making plans to leave.⁴⁶

Far from elucidating the reasons for the exodus, Kaul's memoir only muddies the waters. It seems extraordinary that networks of communication had broken down so thoroughly in a matter of hours that not a single Pandit in Srinagar knew what was happening in their own city (but were able to ascertain the fate of 'relatives and friends' elsewhere in the Valley). Even assuming there was confusion at the time, writing nearly a quarter century after the event, Kaul still makes no attempt to explain the 'clamour' among Muslims. In fact, the date of 19 January 1990 was just as momentous for many Kashmiri Muslims living in Srinagar and its neighbourhood; state manoeuvres that night set into motion the first general massacre of unarmed protestors at Gaw Kadal two days later.

Jagmohan had been sent to the state on 19 January for a second term as Governor of Jammu and Kashmir. The highlights of his first stint (1984–89) were the dismissal of a democratically elected chief minister and of his unpopular successor, followed by governor's rule. Victoria Schofield has written of 'a general onslaught on Muslim culture and identity, both through the educational curriculum and socially' during his governorship.⁴⁷ And it was under his aegis that Kashmir's most rigged elections were held in 1987, triggering complete disenchantment with Indian democratic procedures and further driving many Kashmiris to armed resistance. Only weeks before Jagmohan arrived for his second tenure, the central government had lost face ignominiously when it had been forced, in December 1989, to release five militants in exchange for the return of the Home Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed's daughter kidnapped by the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front. Jagmohan was sent to put some iron back into Delhi's fist.

His new term opened with draconian action, setting the tone for the rest of it. On the night of 19 January 1990, the Central Reserve Police Force and other paramilitary groups conducted exhaustive raids and searches to apprehend 'terrorists' allegedly hiding in certain quarters of Srinagar. By the early morning, about four hundred Hindus and Muslims had been dragged out, beaten, and arrested. On 20 January, when citizens of Srinagar collected outside the divisional commissioner's office to protest the 'atrocities' of the previous night, they were tear-gassed and curfew was imposed by nightfall – a curfew that was to last weeks. On the following day, 21 January, the growing outrage over the last two days'

events manifested itself in a procession of about 20,000 people from Srinagar and its environs, defying the curfew to protest peacefully the illegal searches and arrests⁴⁸. When the protestors reached the Gaw Kadal bridge paramilitary forces began firing indiscriminately; the official death toll was 60 and the unofficial more than 200. As alarming as the high fatality – including children – were the ruthlessness and religious bias of the security forces on display.⁴⁹

The date of the massacre appears on the Kashmiri Muslim protest and mourning calendar. But it finds no mention in Jagmohan's otherwise bulky memoirs. Nor was any public enquiry ordered. And yet, as Balraj Puri suggests, with this massacre 'militancy entered a new phase. It was no longer a fight between the militants and the security forces. It gradually assumed the form of a total insurgency of the entire population'.⁵⁰ The Gaw Kadal massacre is largely absent also from the published memoirs of Pandit exiles.

Insofar as the impact of 19 January on Muslims is mentioned at all, cause and effect are so ordered as to suggest they had brought it upon themselves. Thus, Kundan Lal Chowdhury describes the cacophony emanating from 'thousands of loudspeakers hoisted on as many mosques' that 'boomed' calls for *azadi* and 'war cries, exhorting the masses to come out of their homes and march to Srinagar to capture power' all over the Valley. These were intermingled with anti-Pandit slogans. Enter Jagmohan, 'known as a tough administrator', to restore quiet and order. 'Police were forced to shoot in order to disperse the rampaging hordes'. Yes, 'there were civilian injuries and deaths', but the unruly Muslims gave the administration no choice.⁵¹

Rahul Pandita portrays Jagmohan spending that night 'feeling absolutely helpless'. The Governor, still in Jammu, received many calls from terrified Pandits. But, says Pandita, he was in no position to help.⁵² It is not clear why; after all, he had already been sworn in as governor in Jammu earlier on the 19th. In any case, Jagmohan himself suggests that upon receiving those fear-laden messages he communicated with various senior administrative and police officials and 'goaded' them to act promptly, keeping the army on standby.⁵³ Nor was he helpless when it came to the paramilitary forces' actions on the same night. Jagmohan, claiming he had no knowledge of this, later blamed Farooq Abdullah (chief minister until his arrival) for the CRPF's deployment.⁵⁴ Few people would deem Abdullah incapable of bungling, but it is harder to credit Jagmohan's assertion of ignorance. Whether or not Jagmohan can be blamed for the raids on the 19th, he was clearly in the driver's seat when the killings happened at Gaw Kadal on 21 January. In consultation with his adviser and the army's top brass in Srinagar, he called for decisive action, the most urgent task being to ensure the curfew imposed since the night of 20 January was strictly enforced. In his view, firing became necessary because 'the crowds . . . had gone berserk'.

The consonance in Jagmohan's account and Pandit stories is hard to miss. That the total number of those killed was larger than the twelve he mentions, that these were peaceful demonstrations, that there were children present in them, all became for Jagmohan stories 'churned out' by 'the militants and their propaganda outfits, and the rumour mill, which always worked overtime in Kashmir'.⁵⁵

Crafting the violent Kashmiri Muslim

Thus, many Pandit accounts since 1990 have been rife with suggestions that the Valley's Muslims were complicit – either directly or through inaction – in creating the terror that drove them out of their homeland. There is no acknowledgment that many Muslims, too, have had to leave the Valley. They have been similarly affected by the disruptions of their livelihoods, threats to their lives, family, and property, whether from the state or indeed from Kashmiri elements espousing inimical political and religious ideologies. The silence about these other victims of contemporary conditions implicates the many Kashmiri Muslims in the actions of a few aggressors. Extraordinarily, many Pandits place the entire burden of rectification on Muslims. Thus, Varad Sharma suggests that for reconciliation 'in its truest sense' to be possible there must be 'an acknowledgment of the wrongdoings by the majority community of Kashmiri Muslims' and that 'separatism and Islamic fanaticism [must] cease to exist in Kashmir'.⁵⁶

An important element in the recollections of many Pandits is the effect the killing in the early 1990s of a number of Pandit officials had in shaking their sense of security. Various groups of militants claim that their targets were Indian government 'agents' and so, in eliminating them, they were essentially waging war against the state. Contrariwise, Pandits insist that the targets being exclusively Hindu indicated a 'communal' threat.⁵⁷ It is only common sense that not every Pandit could have been an informer or a spy. But what is perplexing is that while the connection of numerous Pandits with the state's intelligence apparatus is denied in discussions relating to their roles in Kashmir, it is well advertised when making demands upon the state's resources in Indian law courts. The latter became an important arena for shaping Pandit narratives.

P. K. Handoo had worked in the Intelligence Bureau until his retirement in 2004. Forced to leave Kashmir 'due to militancy', he had been given government housing in New Delhi. Nearly a year after retiring, he appealed to the Delhi High Court to let him keep those premises 'till the government makes it possible for him to return to Srinagar or till suitable alternate accommodation is provided to him anywhere in Delhi'. The first condition is so entangled with contentious political questions of what would constitute a truly 'safe return' that it could stretch the state's responsibility ad infinitum, or at least until a yet unforeseeable future. Handoo referred to 'extraordinary circumstances' entitling him to continued government largesse. These appear in Justice J. M. Malik's judgement, which contended that while 'militancy in Kashmir' had affected the 'minority Kashmiri Pandits' generally, the petitioner became a 'prime target because he was working in [the] Intelligence Bureau. In addition . . . his younger brother was working in RAW [the external intelligence wing]'. The court upheld Handoo's petition.⁵⁸

In yet another case presented before the Delhi High Court, militancy in Kashmir justified special privileges for exiled Pandits. This lawsuit, adjudicated on 30 November 2010, involved some twenty-four Pandit refugees with a plea similar to Handoo's. Justice Gita Mittal in pronouncing the judgement summed up the petitioners' situation as arising from the 'unprecedented ethnic cleansing of a

minority community from the Kashmir valley'. As the state was unable 'to protect them and their property from violence', the Pandit appellants 'were rendered homeless'. In this instance, too, the Pandit petitioners had asserted almost formulaically 'that those representing the Central Government in the Kashmir valley, especially those who were representing the intelligence agencies, paramilitary and defence forces as well as the Government media became prime targets of the militants'.⁵⁹

While it is difficult to establish the precise nature of work done by intelligence outfits in Kashmir, the violently repressive actions of the 'paramilitary and defence forces' are comparatively well-documented in contemporary accounts, whether in newspapers or in the documents produced by human rights and civil rights activists. At any rate, these testimonies freely given in Indian courts corroborate the claim of militants that at least some Pandits did act as agents of the state in Kashmir; of course, this does not offer justification for killing them.

Furthermore, what is notable in both these judicial accounts is that the Indian state not only undertook responsibility for protecting some Pandits as its employees but went further to admit responsibility for the entire community. Conversely, in their petitions to the state both sets of Pandit appellants superimposed none too subtly their particular personal/familial interests onto the interests and experiences of the whole community. Both the language of the state and of these particular Pandits worked in tandem to suffuse the spaces of discourse with narrations of Kashmiri Muslim violence; looming large in the background of both judgements is the decontextualized figure of the blood-letting Kashmiri Muslim engaged in 'ethnic cleansing' who must be contained. Such rhetoric continues to proliferate despite the fact that Kashmiri protest has long turned preponderantly non-violent. Indian state sources themselves indicate that armed militancy has declined considerably since the highs of the decade 1993 to 2003, when the number just of militants killed was over 14,000.⁶⁰ The state's pacification drives, so to speak, have largely defeated the armed insurgency; by mid-2017, despite a small increase, police reports still only counted some 200 militants active in Kashmir.⁶¹

Kashmiri Pandits and the Hindu right

Parmeshwari Handoo's is a name that older Kashmiris and many younger ones would recognize. She became a cause célèbre in the late 1960s; her story emblemizes for many Pandits the slings and arrows that have blighted their fortunes in Kashmir after 1947. In 1967, her Muslim co-worker Ghulam Rasool Kanth allegedly abducted Parmeshwari, a 17-year-old minor. Mir Qasba, the manager of a retail outlet in Srinagar where both worked, was accused of collusion, as was the 'Muslim' police.⁶² She was then forcibly converted to Islam and married to Kanth. Or so the Pandit version has it.⁶³ Alternative versions contest Parmeshwari's being a minor as well as her forcible conversion and marriage.

Pradeep Kaul recalls with pride how, as a child, he had participated in the 'historic agitation' launched to 'recover' Parmeshwari. According to him, by the time

the campaign ended, Srinagar's Sheetalnath temple complex – the agitation's headquarters – had been 'vandalized' and 'burnt', and many Pandits had been threatened and beaten by 'mobsters belonging to the majority community'. As Kaul sees it, the 'failure of this great agitation' was a blow after which the 'fear of an overwhelming and domineering majority [had] started haunting' the Pandits. What Kaul neglects entirely to mention in his recollections was the involvement of Hindu right-wingers from outside the Valley. In fact, their presence signals this was more than a Pandit agitation seeking redress; it was a show of strength in alliance with the mighty numbers of their Hindu brethren in India.

The campaign began on 7 August 1967. Shiv Narain Fotedar (chairman of the state legislative council) warned in his speech that any harm done to the Pandits would have 'repercussions in India'. The Kashmir Hindu Action Committee (KHAC) established to organize the movement to recover Parmeshwari declared itself the 'sole representative and organization empowered to negotiate with the Government and attend to other social, economic, religious and other affairs of the community'.⁶⁴ The agitation had become an opportunity both to make broader Pandit claims on the government and for certain members to establish their leadership within the community.

By 13 August, the KHAC warned that the community's being a minority should not be taken to 'mean that they were weak and India was not with them'. That day's meeting was presided over by a Pandit leader from the Hindu right-wing Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), Triloki Nath Dhar, and the speakers included a number of non-Kashmiri Hindus from Delhi, Punjab, and Andhra Pradesh. By now there was a gathering of luminaries of the Hindu Mahasabha, too, warming up for a big showdown. The old Kashmiri Pandit organization, the Yuvak Sabha (founded in the early 1930s), had already joined forces with the KHAC. When Parmeshwari would still not return, the agitation kicked into full gear in the form of processions, sit-ins, and satyagrahas involving a wide cross-section of the community. On 22 August, the India-wide president of the BJS, Balraj Madhok, delivered a speech demanding the state's full integration with India. He told Muslims that if they persisted with their demand for a plebiscite they should leave for Pakistan. As intended, this triggered large Muslim demonstrations in various parts of Srinagar. The agitation was formally withdrawn on 3 September 1967 through the intercession of the Indian home minister. Police firing had killed seven Pandits in the agitation.⁶⁵

The campaign lives on in the memories of Pandits like Pradeep Kaul as a moment of heroic assertion. In their view, they had shown Muslims that their small numbers in the Valley did not mean they could be trifled with. But the point such Pandits seemed to have missed in 1967 – not for the first or the last time – is that they were bit players in a much bigger drama set well beyond the Valley. The BJS heavyweights' minatory speeches against Kashmiri Muslims had more in mind than undoing an interfaith marriage; they were engaged in a politics that sought power in India. What the 'Parmeshwari affair' also reveals is that links between many Pandits and Hindu supremacists are not, as is commonly asserted, the result merely of the latter's exploiting the exiled community's

miseries after 1990. Members of the Pandit community had relied on the wider Hindu nation to protect their interests well before the exodus. Ironically, when Kashmiri Muslims expressed affinity with the wider world of Islam, the same Pradeep Kaul had labelled them anti-national.

Making Kashmir Hindu again?

Certainly, Indian political parties of all shades, but especially the Hindu right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, successor of the BJS) and its ideological parent the Rashtriya Swayamsewaka Sangh, have dredged the suffering of displaced Pandits for political gold. Recycling the rhetoric of bloody vivisection derived from Partition narratives, the Hindu Right has reinforced both the idea of the nation as a sacralized geo-body – an embodiment of a mother goddess – and of its parts as ‘*atoot ang*’ (unbreakable part). Kashmiri Pandit ‘aborigines’ driven out of their homeland – the abode of ancient high Hindu traditions – by Kashmiri Muslim separatists/terrorists provide the perfect pretext for flexing Hindu muscles in the name of a deified *Bharat Mata* (Mother India). And in December 1991, *Panun* Kashmir (Our Own Kashmir), a reactionary organization of Pandit refugees, had already defined its demands in a ‘Homeland Resolution’. Its website asserts its aim is to ‘*Save Kashmiri Pandits to Save Kashmir to Save India*’ by ‘reconquer[ing] that Kashmir which is almost lost’ to the ‘Islamic religious fundamentalists in the valley of Kashmir’.⁶⁶

Among the most prominent symbols of Kashmiri distinctiveness at which Hindu right-wingers have tilted almost since its introduction into the Indian Constitution in 1947 was article 370. In their view, it was a severing scimitar that needed to be sheathed so that the state of Jammu and Kashmir might be fully assimilated within a truly integral (Hindu) India. This Article, when it had first been introduced, had given Jammu and Kashmir a special status within the Union. That state would have separate laws, its own flag, constitution, and definition of citizenship, while still forming a part of the territory of India. It limited the Union Government’s legislative jurisdiction to the subjects mentioned in the instrument of accession Maharaja Hari Singh had signed on 26 October 1947. These were foreign affairs, defence, currency, and communications. And even these ties to the union were conditional on its people confirming their erstwhile ruler’s accession to India through a plebiscite. As discussed in many other works, the meaty bits of autonomy embodied in Article 370 had been picked off one morsel at a time; by 1964–65 there were only a few bones of contention remaining.⁶⁷ Among them was Article 35A of the Constitution added through a Presidential Order in 1954 that reserved certain entitlements to ‘permanent residents’ (formerly termed ‘state subjects’), namely the rights to acquire immovable property, to vote in elections, and eligibility for certain government positions in the state. It not only acknowledged the J&K legislature’s right to define who permanent residents are but also guaranteed these special provisions to them.

These were (except voting rights), beneficences the maharaja Hari Singh had granted in 1927 following agitations spearheaded by his more privileged Hindu

subjects especially the Pandits; the latter's concern had been to stem the steady accumulation of wealth (including land) and the cornering of positions in the administration's higher rungs by growing numbers of 'outsiders'. To hear many contemporary Indians speak, however, one might imagine this dispensation to have been the brainchild of Kashmiri Muslim 'separatists'. So the abrogation of these privileges – and the exorcism of even the spectral presence of Article 370 – was demanded vigorously by sections of Indians who viewed them as blasphemy against the cult of national integration. In the view of Hindu supremacists, Article 35A was a vexing obstacle in the way of the only satisfactory final solution for the 'Kashmir problem': inundating the state with (Hindu) Indians armed with the right to vote and to acquire land.

On 27 August 2017, at its annual national convention held in Jammu, Panun Kashmir had passed several resolutions including the demand for the revocation of Articles 370 and 35A. This was an incongruous move since, as mentioned above, Pandits had campaigned so vigorously in the early twentieth century for the special provisions enshrined in the latter. Panun Kashmir's resolution stated that it 'realise[d] that unless article 370 [was] abolished, the movement for repeated partitions of India [would] remain alive and potent'. Another resolution passed at the same meeting was an older one demanding the 'political reorganisation of the state and creation of a centrally-administered union territory north and east of the Jhelum river for the return and rehabilitation of Kashmiri Pandits'. One would have thought a separate homeland for Pandits would have been best guaranteed precisely by Articles 370 and 35A. Perhaps a clue to this perplexing turnaround lies in the remarks of Hari Om Mahajan, a former senior leader of the J&K unit of the BJP. Describing Article 35A as 'discriminatory and unconstitutional', he also obligingly slipped in a caution to the government, presumably at the Centre, 'against [the] settling of Rohingyas and Bangladeshi Muslims in [the] Jammu region'. He went on to warn that the 'ongoing demographic attrition in Jammu need[ed] to be reversed at every cost, as Jammu [was] the backbone of the nation in the state'.⁶⁸

That last reference to Jammu dovetails with results of the state assembly elections held in late 2014. At the start of the campaign, the national BJP's declared goal had been to obtain forty-four or more seats, which would have meant winning most seats in Jammu and some in Kashmir and Ladakh. The BJP won none in either the Valley or Ladakh; all its seats came from Jammu. But as the second largest party in the state it earned its ticket to govern through power sharing with the Kashmir-based People's Democratic Party. Hindu Jammu was therefore deemed the bastion of the nation holding back the rampaging hordes of Islamists in Kashmir.

Many Pandits, especially those of the younger generation, have come to realize that their community's return to Kashmir is not a realistic prospect at least not in the near future.⁶⁹ Therefore, the protections Article 35A had provided may have seemed irrelevant to them. Opening up the opportunity for large numbers of Hindus (but certainly not Rohingya or Bangladeshi Muslims) to acquire land, employment, and every other incentive to settle in the state may have appeared

to be the next best thing. Indeed, an unfettered land market would bring in better returns for those who still have property in the state but are prevented by Article 35A from selling it freely to the highest bidder. This may sound counter-intuitive given the vigorous Pandit proclamations about reclaiming Kashmir at any cost. However, for those not ensnared by such protestations, such a shift is not inconceivable; indeed, for those willing to see it there is already a quiet acceptance of new realities in evidence among numerous Pandits.⁷⁰ As for the rhetoric, history has demonstrated the pragmatic shifts Pandits have frequently made in their allegiances. After all many had turned into Kashmiri regionalists in the early twentieth century to fend competition from outsiders and then into Indian nationalists from the 1930s to ward off threats to their regional dominance by their more numerous Muslim compatriots.⁷¹ It is, therefore, not anomalous for large numbers among them to have turned into Hindu nationalists more recently. Their shaping of their past has certainly primed many into claiming high status in India as the purest Hindus of all. And with a little help from the saffron brotherhood of India, the clock might yet be turned back and Kashmir made Hindu again.

Cui Bono?

On 5 August 2019, the BJP-led government at the centre deployed state power – using its majority in the parliament – to abrogate Articles 370 and 35A as well as to divide the former state of Jammu and Kashmir into the two parts of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. Both entities were downgraded from the rank of states to that of union territories (administered directly from New Delhi). The BJP thus fulfilled a long-standing goal forming a vital part of its political programme of constructing a Hindu nation in India. In doing so it had felt no need to even inform in advance – let alone consult – the people of the territories concerned. Instead, the BJP's propaganda machinery immediately began churning out accounts of 'normalcy', economic boons to come, and widespread appreciation of the measures in Kashmir. However, that its unilateral actions had to be accompanied by the harshest clampdown the region has seen in recent years is evidence that the central government was aware of how unacceptable its measures were, especially in the Valley. Information still flows only very partially from the region so it is difficult to comment with any confidence on how the abrogations and the downgrading of the reshaped state to union territory status has been received by most people in Kashmir. Yet, the prime minister Narendra Modi, advertising the state's strength, has frequently reiterated his government's determination to override any criticism, including the many that came from international quarters regarding the drastic curbs on civil liberties especially in the Valley after 5 August 2019. Such was the power the state had accumulated that he could declare: 'Duniya bhar ke saarey dabao ke bawjood, inn faislon par hum qayam hain aur qayam rahengey (Despite pressure from all parts of the world, we remain firm and will continue to remain firm on these decisions)'.⁷²

And the BJP's bulldozing of Jammu and Kashmir's special status relied importantly on annexing the narratives produced by many Kashmiri Pandits from exile

that have been discussed above. The reaction of several organizations claiming to represent displaced Kashmiri Pandits bears this out. In late July 2020, Satish Mahaldar, the chairman of a body called Reconciliation, Relief and Rehabilitation of Migrant Kashmiris, speaking ahead of the one-year anniversary of 5 August 2019, demanded not just the restoration of statehood to Jammu and Kashmir but also the return of its special status. The more prominent Kashmiri Pandit organizations outside the Valley were quick in their denunciation, claiming not only that Mahaldar's group did not represent displaced Pandits but, more damningly, that it was a creature of the separatist Hurriyat Conference. Prominent among those repudiating Mahaldar's views were the reactionary organizations Roots in Kashmir, the Jammu Kashmir Vichar Manch and an umbrella body of Pandit groups called the All India Kashmiri Samaj. They issued a joint press statement on 27 July 2020 condemning Mahaldar's statement for 'giv[ing] a false impression that Kashmiri Pandits are against the abrogation of Article 370 . . .'. On the contrary, they emphasized, the 'Kashmiri Pandits have had for three decades demanded abrogation of Article 370 & 35A and creation of a Union Territory [sic]'. Indeed, the statement continued, 'it was because of the efforts of the Kashmiri Pandits, that public opinion was created that forced the government to abrogate these articles'. Panun Kashmir joined the fray in excoriating Satish Mahaldar. Its Chairman, Dr Ajay Chhangoo, also emphasized that 'Kashmiri Pandits had always been at the forefront in the battle against Article[s] 370 and 35A'. Furthermore, he described the removal of Article 370 as a 'liberating act' because its existence had 'created the basis for converting J&K into a Muslim state on the territory of secular India'.⁷³

Evidently, some Kashmiri Pandits – whether consciously or not – have done yeoman's work in providing the state with the dangerous citizens it requires to shore up its sovereign power. Their narrations have produced the idea of violence-exuding Kashmiri Muslims who engage in ethnic cleansing and genocide. This provides emergency-on-a-loop through constantly suppressing which Indian sovereignty forms and reforms itself. Further, Kashmiri agitations have been deprecated as the creation of religious fundamentalists. That their political slogans are inflected in the religio-cultural idiom of Muslims serves as proof of 'jihadism'. The constructed symbol of the violent Kashmiri Muslim citizen/terrorist – for whom a 'state of exception' is declared putting them beyond the pale of ordinary laws – allows the state to accrue more power and the orderly sovereignty of the Indian republic to emerge stronger than ever.

On the other hand, any demand for reopening discussions on the status of Kashmir within India, on rolling back repressive laws – such as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (1990) and the Public Safety Act (1978, amended in 1990) – in force in the Valley, on more thorough investigation and punishment of human rights violations, are all-too-frequently dismissed by reference to the Pandit exodus. The movement for *azadi* is delegitimized for its allegedly barbaric treatment of the minority Pandits who were wrenched from their ancient homes. The status quo is frozen and any resolution of the political impasse is made conditional on the return of the Pandits to the Valley, whether or not any but a minority wants this

any longer. In mortgaging the majority Kashmiris' future to the Pandit question, in demanding that Muslims atone for the sin of demanding *azadi*, many exiled Pandits have excluded themselves from Kashmir. It remains to be seen whether their pact with the BJP-led government – and against their Muslim co-regionalists – will serve their interests in the long run. But what is manifest is that, in the end, it is state power that has profited most.

Notes

- 1 The precise number of Pandits involved is the subject of considerable dispute. The estimates mentioned here are taken from Sumantra Bose, *The Challenge in Kashmir: Democracy, Self-Determination and a Just Peace* (New Delhi and London: Sage and Thousand Oaks, 1997), p. 71.
- 2 Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007); Jeffrey Ollick (ed.), *States of Memory: Continuities, Conflicts and Transformations in National Retrospection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, translated by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992).
- 3 Asia Watch and Physicians for Human Rights, *The Human Rights Crisis in Kashmir: A Pattern of Impunity* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1993), pp. 159–162.
- 4 US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2010*, 2 volumes (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2010), Vol. II, p. 2418.
- 5 Rahul Pandita, *Our Moon Has Blood Clots: A Memoir of a Lost Home in Kashmir* (Gurgaon: Vintage and the New India Foundation, 2014), p. 11.
- 6 *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.
- 7 Some scholars suggest it was redacted in Gandhara when it was under Kushana rule. Pia Brancaccio and Xinru Liu, 'Dionysus and Drama in the Buddhist Art of Gandhara', *Journal of Global History*, Vol. 4, 2009, pp. 219–244, 226.
- 8 Alexis Sanderson, 'Kashmir', in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, edited by Knut A. Jacobsen (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009), Vol. 1, p. 101.
- 9 M.A. Stein (Translator and annotator), *Kalhana's Rajatarangini: A Chronicle of the Kings of Kashmir*, 2 vols. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, first Indian ed. 1900, repr. 2017), Vol. 1, First Book, verses 25–28.
- 10 Chitralkha Zutshi, *Kashmir's Contested Pasts: Narratives, Sacred Geographies, and the Historical Imagination* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 1–2, 39–40, 63–64.
- 11 Pandita, *Our Moon Has Blood Clots*, p. 12. Italics in the original.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- 13 H.H. Wilson, 'An Essay on the Hindu History of Cashmir', *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. XV, 1825, pp. 1–119, reproduced in H.H. Wilson, *The Hindu History of Kashmir* (Calcutta: Susil Gupta Pvt. Ltd, 1960), pp. 1, 2, 6, 76.
- 14 Zutshi, *Kashmir's Contested Pasts*, pp. 4–6.
- 15 Georg Bühler, 'Detailed Report of a Tour in Search of Sanskrit MSS Made in Kashmir, Rajputana, and Central India', *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1877, Bombay, Branch 12, Extra Number, 34A, pp. 1–5.
- 16 K.N. Dhar, 'Lalleshwari, an Apostle of Human Values', *Glimpses of Kashmiri Culture*, Shri Parmanand Research Institute, Srinagar, Kashmir, n.d., www.koausa.org/Glimpses/Lalleshwari.html [Accessed 19 January 2018].
- 17 Mridu Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights and the History of Kashmir* (Princeton: Princeton University Press; London: C. Hurst; and Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), pp. 243–244.

- 18 Pandita, *Our Moon Has Blood Clots*, p. 12.
- 19 Ibid., pp. 12, 15–19.
- 20 Michael Witzel, 'The Kashmiri Pandits: Their Early History', in *The Valley of Kashmir: The Making and Unmaking of a Composite Culture?* edited by Aparna Rao (New Delhi: Manohar, 2008), pp. 38–39, 90.
- 21 Sanderson, 'Kashmir', p. 101.
- 22 Walter Slaje, 'Kashmir Minimundus: India's Sacred Geography *en miniature*', in *Highland Philology*, edited by R. Steiner (Wittenberg: Universitätsverlag Halle, 2012), pp. 26–28.
- 23 Shonaleeka Kaul, *The Making of Early Kashmir: Landscape and Identity in the Rajatarangini* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 103.
- 24 Ibid., pp. 103–104. Kaul provides only cursory evidence for her conclusion that Indic civilization – a concept so broad as to be ahistorical – made Kashmir "central" in cultural terms within its "regional configuration" that, according to her, included Gandhara, Ladakh, and Punjab among others.
- 25 Kaul, *The Making of Early Kashmir*, pp. 99–101.
- 26 Ibid., pp. 104–105.
- 27 Ibid., p. 106, fn 12 on p. 106.
- 28 Ibid., p. 123, fn 45. Here Kaul is referring to my work and that of Chitralekha Zutshi.
- 29 Kaul, *The Making of Early Kashmir*, p. 13.
- 30 Ibid., p. 14.
- 31 T.N. Madan, *Family and Kinship: A Study of the Pandits of Rural Kashmir* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, Fiftieth anniversary ed., 2016), p. 13.
- 32 Bühler, 'Detailed Report of a Tour', p. 19.
- 33 Sanderson, 'Kashmir', p. 100.
- 34 Ibid., p. 101.
- 35 Bühler, 'Detailed Report of a Tour', p. 19.
- 36 Ibid., p. 20.
- 37 Sanderson, 'Kashmir', p. 99.
- 38 Madan, *Family and Kinship*, pp. 19–20 and Madan, 'Religious Ideology and Social Structure: the Hindus and Muslims of Kashmir', in *Ritual and Religion Among Muslims in India*, edited by Imtiaz Ahmad (New Delhi: Manohar, 1984), p. 40.
- 39 Bühler, 'Detailed Report of a Tour', pp. 19–20.
- 40 Pandita, *Our Moon Has Blood Clots*, p. 93.
- 41 Azad Essa, 'Kashmiri Pandits: Why We Never Fled Kashmir', *Al Jazeera*, 2 August 2011, www.aljazeera.com/indepth/spotlight/kashmirtheforgottenconflict/2011/07/201176134818984961.html [Accessed 25 January 2018].
- 42 Pandita, *Our Moon Has Blood Clots*, pp. 220–221.
- 43 Essa, 'Kashmiri Pandits: Why We Never Fled Kashmir'.
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8 Kashmiri imaginings of freedom in the global arenas

Shahla Hussain

Taking on the voice of a war journalist, the prominent Kashmiri American poet Agha Shahid Ali's poem "The Correspondent" takes note of conflicts unfolding across the world – in Palestine, Bosnia, Armenia, and Chechnya.

I've just come – with videos from Sarajevo
His footage is priceless with sympathy,
close-ups in slow motion, from bombed sites
to the dissolve of mosques in colonnades.
Then, wheelchairs on a ramp, burning.

I ask: When will the satellites
transmit my songs, carry Kashmir, aubades
always for dawns to stamp
True! across seas?¹

While illuminating the brutalized landscape of Sarajevo in the aftermath of the Bosnian civil war, Ali also draws attention to the absence of Kashmir's representation in the international arena, despite the immense human suffering endured by a region engulfed in the terrors of war. In the United Nations, the fundamental disagreement between India and Pakistan on the origins and evolution of the sovereignty dispute created a stalemate over Kashmir, which not only prevented Kashmiris from exercising the right of self-determination as promised by the Security Council resolutions of 1948 but also created a broader narrative that framed the conflict as a territorial dispute between the two countries. Kashmiri aspirations held no relevance. In the post-insurgency era of the 1990s, labeling Kashmiri mass resistance as a Pakistan-sponsored Islamist movement further perpetuated this misconception, while also delegitimizing voices that clamored for freedom. It's not a coincidence that the voice penetrating the international community's indifference toward Kashmir came from outside the subcontinent: continuous turmoil in the homeland, combined with universal freedom movements in the international arena, resulted in new expressions of transnational political belonging that attempted to change public opinion and global politics around the Kashmiri struggle.²

Although it was the transnational Kashmiri community who took the lead in changing international attitudes about political exclusion in their homeland, research has settled into a construal of Kashmir as a region under dispute from India and Pakistan, rather than on Kashmiris themselves, who have myriad imaginings of freedom. The histories of Indian-administered Kashmir and Pakistani-administered Kashmir after the drawing of the cease-fire line have been studied separately, with scholars assuming the two regions were isolated and disconnected from each other. On the contrary, this paper moves beyond the territorially bounded nationalist frameworks to address the ideological and political connections forged by Kashmiri transnational activists in the diasporic space.

Scholarship on South Asian historiography by Sugata Bose, Kris Manjappa, Sana Aiyar, and Maia Ramnath has illuminated the extraterritorial dimension of Indian nationalism that allowed South Asians in the diaspora to express allegiance with other anti-colonial movements in the global space.³ Applying this scholarship to the contested northernmost region of the subcontinent, this paper explores Kashmiri imaginings of freedom in the global arenas, especially during the eventful decades of the 1960s and 1970s, when the anti-colonial struggles across Africa, Asia, and Latin America shaped transnational solidarities and conjured up new imaginaries of social justice, economic equity, and political freedom. These powerful ideas inspired expatriates from Pakistani-administered Kashmir in Britain as they attempted to redefine the Kashmiri conflict while navigating the pressures of living on the margins of the host society.

By placing the marginalized region in a broader transnational history, this paper also brings to light how transnational actors and the long-distance nationalism of Kashmiri emigrant groups made Kashmiris visible in the international arena and displaced perceptions of their homeland as a peripheral region to be controlled and conquered. The British Kashmiris in the 1960s and 1970s shaped their political claims in the image of the worldwide political movements for self-determination in the twentieth century to draw inspiration from several liberation movements to legitimize their claims. Reading transnational connections in this way offers insight into the ways expatriate Kashmiri activists challenged and replicated the territorial nationalism of both nation-states and claimed that Kashmiris should have the right to choose independence for the entire state.

Forging communities and common identity

Centuries before India and Pakistan laid claim to their homeland in 1947, itinerant Muslim laborers from the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir had a history of migration to Britain. For them, relocation was the only outlet to escape the poverty and political suppression that engulfed Kashmir under the Dogra Raj. As they moved to different parts of British India in the late nineteenth century, they worked as laborers on roads and railways and brought home money that could sustain their families and help pay land revenue.⁴ Some of them migrated to the port city of Bombay and found employment as lascars on the British merchant fleets, where they worked as stokers in coal rooms.⁵ During World War I, the

demand for lascars gained momentum as many British commercial sailors were pushed into the service of national defense. The colonial government appointed commission-based agents (*tekhedars*) who went from village to village recruiting Kashmiris as stokers.⁶ Although one of the clauses of the agreement clearly stated that lascars could not stay over in England, the mistreatment they suffered on board made many desert the ships, giving up their wages and risking destitution in an alien land.⁷ After World War II, the British army recruited a large number of soldiers from its colonies, including the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir; many of them ended up in Britain when the war was over.⁸ These early Kashmiri migrants were the pioneers of the chain migration that started after decolonization, especially from the eastern part of the old Jammu province, which in the postcolonial era came under the control of Pakistan.

The large-scale migrations to Britain from Pakistani-administered Kashmir coincided with two economic developments: one in Britain and the other on the South Asian subcontinent. Britain, like other European countries, experienced extreme labor shortages because of the postwar economic boom and looked toward its former empire for cheap sources of labor.⁹ Meanwhile, in the subcontinent, the first India-Pakistan war of 1948 had created economic hardships for Kashmiris, especially for those living in Pakistani-administered Kashmir. This part of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir lacked economic resources, industrial growth, and high agricultural production thus making economic sustenance difficult for its inhabitants, as compared to the subregions of Jammu and Kashmir controlled by India.¹⁰ The division of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir that cut all road links, especially the famous Jhelum Valley Road that had allowed trade between the Kashmir Valley and the rest of India further reduced options for economic growth in Pakistani-administered Kashmir. This forced a considerable majority inhabiting the Pahari speaking areas of Pakistani-administered Kashmir to take advantage of the British economic boom and come to work in the industrial towns of Bradford, Birmingham, Manchester, and Luton.¹¹ Most of these labor migrants retained close familial ties with the homeland and frequently visited their families. Until the mid-1950s, these Kashmiri migrants lived on the margins of society and saw themselves as temporary migrants, planning to return home to their families after saving their earnings.¹²

Due to poor wages and conditions of labor during this period, conflicts began to emerge between Kashmiri men and the British society, which “consolidated the status of Kashmiris as a new ‘black’ proletariat.”¹³ In the summer of 1958, a wave of violent encounters between the immigrants and the host community made the immigrants susceptible to new forms of scrutiny. The immigration debates in Britain hinged on making the law more stringent. The new Commonwealth Immigrants Acts restricted immigration of commonwealth citizens to England, limiting the entry of dependents to wives, minor children, and aged parents.¹⁴ These immigration procedures prompted laborers to bring over their families in the early 1960s in an effort to “beat the ban” on immigration.¹⁵

This period of restricted immigration coincided with the construction of the Mangla Dam in Pakistani-administered Kashmir, across Jhelum River in Mirpur

to allow for a regular supply of water to irrigate large areas of farmland across Pakistan, especially in Punjab. In 1966, when the dam was completed, “81,000 people were relocated, 32,900 houses were replaced, and 35,600 hectares (88,000 acres) of land was acquired. Six towns and 255 villages were affected.”¹⁶ The construction of the dam mutilated shrines and graveyards and destroyed roads and infrastructure.¹⁷ Though the dam was located in Kashmir, the other parts of Pakistan reaped its benefits – excellent irrigation facilities and cheap electricity – causing many grievances among Mirpuris. This event became the major cause of the mass migration from Mirpur to Britain and accentuated the resentment of Kashmiri expatriates toward Pakistan. Displaced from their homeland, the Kashmiri laborers found it difficult, due to lack of education and language skills, to integrate within British society.

Despite the hardships that marred the lives of these Kashmiri migrants in Britain, they found various avenues for congregating and providing each other with fellowship and support. Their experiences of racial discrimination and the language barrier between them and the British subjects brought them closer to each other. Kashmiri cafes that served South Asian food and played Bollywood music emerged as sites where Kashmiris could intermingle.¹⁸ Furthermore, the educated Kashmiris among them reinforced the unique Kashmiri identity through print media. The Urdu newspapers published in Bradford and Birmingham connected migrants in Britain with life in Kashmir, portraying the migrants as “temporary labor whose future life, like the remittance money they sent home to Mirpur and other villages each month, ultimately belonged in Kashmir.”¹⁹ The kinship (*biraderi*) networks strengthened the community identity among the migrants. Established migrants sponsored members of their clans and provided those newcomers with meals and lodging. In turn, the new migrants, when settled, would help other members of the *biraderi*. These kinship networks promoted cohesion among British Kashmiris.²⁰

Kashmiri political identity remained an important marker that united different strands of the British Kashmiri expatriates in shared belonging with the undivided territory of Jammu and Kashmir. The concept of territorial citizenship for Kashmiris was further complicated by the “state subject” criteria introduced by the Dogra maharaja in 1927 and retained by the postcolonial governments, allowing only residents of the state to purchase land and seek employment in Jammu and Kashmir. In Pakistani-administered Kashmir the government recognized all displaced state subjects as Kashmiris.²¹ The residents of Pakistani-administered Kashmir held Pakistani passports for international travel. However, a stamp in the citizenship column identified a Kashmiri as “the subject of Jammu and Kashmir.”²² Cabeiri Robinson has focused on the political strand of Kashmiri identity shaped by the state-subject laws to examine the category of Kashmiri “refugees” and shown how affiliation with the territory of Jammu and Kashmir as it existed before the sovereignty dispute between India and Pakistan became the most salient aspect of Kashmiri identity.²³ Patricia Ellis and Zafar Khan have asserted that “Kashmiri citizenship laws” bind diasporic Kashmiris “psychologically and politically” with the homeland.²⁴ Building on Robinson’s argument, and drawing from

Patricia Ellis and Zafar Khan's contention, I further explore this understanding of political identity to include different linguistic and cultural communities across the line of control and in the wider diaspora united in shared belonging with the undivided territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

Clearly, for the expatriates the significance of belonging to Kashmir and being Kashmiri transcended the cultural and territorial definitions of identity and referred primarily to an emotive attachment to a homeland. The feelings of exclusion and racism experienced in the host society made the British Kashmiris imagine a homeland, free from the territorial control of the nation-states of India and Pakistan, where future generations were guaranteed political rights, economic equality, and social justice. Ultimately, in their imaginings, the end of conflict in their homeland would pave the way for their return to the original "home." These sentiments found a practical outlet in the early 1970s as the community leaders took to political activism in response to political developments on the home front and in the international arena.

By the mid-1960s, the idea of self-determination promised to the Kashmiris in the UN resolutions of 1948 had lost its international relevance. The solutions put forth by the world community considered division of Kashmir's territory between the two claimants – India and Pakistan. World powers like Britain and the United States suggested various proposals that focused on the partition of Jammu and Kashmir.²⁵ The United States' papers on a functional arrangement for the Kashmir dispute suggested two options: a soft partition (a line through the Valley dividing it into areas of Indian and Pakistani sovereignty) and a hard partition with an international administration for the Valley.²⁶ The international community put pressure on both India and Pakistan to "finding an honorable and equitable solution of the issue" acceptable to both parties. The aspirations of Kashmiris were not a priority, a fact that became further apparent after the India-Pakistan war of 1965. The Tashkent agreement that was signed thereafter between the two warring nations put "Kashmir in cold storage," while both countries committed to "settle their disputes through peaceful means" and noninterference in the internal affairs of each other.²⁷ This agreement convinced the British Kashmiris that the Kashmir issue had lost its international relevance and their right of self-determination was no longer an international priority. It had a profound impact on the thinking of the British Kashmiris. However, British Kashmiris lacked a cohesive strategy. Some political groups supported Kashmir's accession to Pakistan while others pushed for the implementation of Kashmiri self-determination as promised by the UN resolutions of 1948. The focus here is on the left-leaning political groups who played a constructive role in finding alternative solutions to plebiscite.

Interrogating imperialism, capitalism, and socialism

The world view of the British Kashmiri activists was shaped by the global political realities that defined the 1960s and 1970s. A group of educated British Kashmiris along with Kashmiris working in various factories at Birmingham in the early 1970s came together to debate, discuss, and provide practical strategies for

attaining Kashmir's freedom. Exposure to the worldwide left-wing activist movements of the twentieth century – especially the International Marxist Group in Britain, which drew from diverse intellectual currents like Maoism and Trotskyism – fascinated the Kashmiri activists as they attempted to replicate these ideas in imagining a revolutionary vision for Kashmir. Throughout the 1970s, the British Kashmiri activists organized social events, debated politics in the cafes, distributed revolutionary literature and pamphlets to generate an awareness among the Kashmiri expatriate community about the new global currents that had swept the world and to brainstorm ways Kashmiris could adapt, modify, or replicate these leftist movements in charting novel approaches for the region's liberation.²⁸

The first British Kashmiri political organization, United Kashmir Liberation Front (UKLF), formed by individuals like Master Abdul Majid, Muhammad Yunus Taryaby, Nazir Nazish, and others, decided to provide an intellectual direction for Kashmir's freedom.²⁹ These individuals lived in a world clearly divided between two conflicting ideologies and rival social systems – capitalism and communism – propagated by two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, who had drawn the entire world into their Cold War politics. Furthermore, the struggle of the superpowers for hegemony had a direct bearing on many Asian, African, and Latin American countries, either recently decolonized or still struggling under the yoke of colonialism. Many of these colonized nations understood freedom not only as the end of foreign occupation, but also as an initiation of a social revolution that could end class disparities and economic inequalities. As a result, the colonized equated capitalism with neocolonialism – a social system that ensured the dominance of the elites over the excluded majority.³⁰ In this battle between two social systems, the experiences of the working-class British Kashmiris, as a part of the poor excluded majority within their homeland and a community struggling against discrimination in English industrial centers, brought them closer to socialist ideology. The British Kashmiris could not remain immune to the new intellectual currents sweeping the world in the 1960s, especially the growing student socialist activism on college campuses that expressed not just opposition to all forms of imperialism but also pushed for strategies of radical protest, direct action, and civil disobedience.

The British Kashmiri activists who were closely tied to the homeland further witnessed how the socialist currents had even reached the shores of the military-ruled Pakistan in the 1960s and seeped into mainstream imagination of poets, writers, and intellectuals as they conceived a socialist revolution. The public discourse in Pakistan centered on the economic disparities and social discontent unleashed by the crippling effects of the India-Pakistan war of 1965 and the growing industrialization that had created a wedge between economic growth and social development. Polarization of wealth was visible, as the rich and the elite twenty-two families “owned 66 percent of industrial assets, 79 percent of insurance and 80 percent of banking,” while the rest struggled to make ends meet.³¹ These apparent contradictions in Pakistani society provoked students, trade union groups, and other left-leaning individuals to launch a series of protest movements and support a new political party, the Pakistan's People's Party (PPP),

whose political manifesto promised not only reform and democratic change but also creation of an egalitarian society. Surrounded by the socialist ideologues, the charismatic leader of PPP, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who later became the prime minister of Pakistan in the election of 1970, fused the concept of socialism with the “progressive aspects of Islam” to counter the narrative of the right-wing Islamist groups that socialism was “anti-Islam” and PPP was as an “atheist” party. The People’s Party denounced the conservative religious parties of being representatives of monopolist capitalists and agents of backwardness and social and spiritual stagnation.³² These debates and counter debates in Pakistan’s political discourse were a constant feature of diasporic newspapers like the London weekly *Mashriq* and were read by British Kashmiris as they contemplated the future of their homeland within the context of socialist principles and ideals.³³

The intellectual journey of the British Kashmiri activists underwent stages of change and progress as they attempted to reconcile their individual beliefs and religious identity with the revolutionary concepts of socialism and communism that dominated the globe. Individuals like Younus Taryaby were raised in a conservative social milieu of Pakistani-administered Kashmir, where the Muslim peasantry had been exploited by the Hindu landlords since generations and perceived social inequalities through the communitarian lens. In Britain, he underwent a mental crisis while reconciling principles of socialism with Islam, especially after reading a series of articles in the *Mashriq* that debated the fatwa issued by more than one hundred religious scholars in Pakistan declaring socialists as heretics. Gradually, there was a transformation in his thinking and it happened at two levels: his observations about the discrimination endured by South Asian workers in the host country, regardless of their religious background, convinced him that real conflicts stemmed from social and economic inequalities that allowed one class to dominate the other. At the same time, constant meetings with other left-leaning diasporic Kashmiris challenged Taryaby’s conventional thinking in that they convinced him that religion is devoid of political ideology while still being an effective tool in the hands of the elites, who skillfully utilize religious, ethnic, and tribal differences to create dissension among poor to suppress independent thinking and keep the poor subjugated.³⁴

One of the individuals who played a key role in transforming Taryaby’s thinking was Nazir Nazish, who was influenced by the Marxist ideals. Born and raised in the Dadyal area of Pakistani-administered Kashmir, Nazish was deeply interested in understanding new revolutionary ideas and ideologies. After he arrived in England, he met Tariq Ali, a prominent British Pakistani political activist who in the late 1960s was an active member of the International Marxist Group (IMG), a party founded in 1965 and affiliated with the Trotskyist Fourth International.³⁵ The party condemned the “class divisions and class relationships characteristic of capitalist societies, especially the domination of working-class interests by the interests of the other classes.”³⁶ The IMG agitated for a revolutionary transformation of societies as they believed parliamentary democracy was an instrument of the state, and that parliament’s subservience to big-business interests made it an instrument of capitalism.³⁷ The real transformation of society, the IMG believed,

was through revolutionary means and as such they supported not only struggles for national liberation and socialism, including the Chinese, Vietnamese, and the Cuban revolutions but also the anti-bureaucratic struggles in Eastern Europe and the struggles for workers' control in the advanced capitalist countries. Nazish became an avid reader of its revolutionary literature, especially the *Black Dwarf* (1968–1970) and the *Red Mole* (1970–1973). Both papers carried a broad range of left-wing opinions in their pages, elaborated on the ideas of Marxism and Trotskyism and devoted issues to topics like the Bolivian diaries of Che Guevara, British imperialism in Ireland, the Vietnam War, and the Cuban revolution.³⁸ These articles proved inspirational to Nazish, and along with other likeminded Kashmiris he became actively involved in the various campaigns organized by IMG to show solidarity with the Vietnamese and the Irish cause by organizing protest demonstrations throughout England. The political exposure to these worldwide struggles made him see that the only way forward for oppressed countries was a revolutionary struggle.

These diasporic activists distributed free copies of *Red Mole* among British Kashmiri workers and organized public gatherings where they could explain these new ideologies to their fellow workers and contemplate revolutionary ideas in visualizing Kashmir's freedom. In a series of pamphlets written between 1971 and 1973, the members of UKLF framed the debate on Kashmir's freedom "in anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist terms."³⁹ Even though the old forms of colonialism no longer existed, many anti-imperialists argued, a new form of imperialism had taken root – one that subjugated other nationalities and suppressed local cultures. The party saw Kashmir's occupation as imperialism, now practiced by India and Pakistan rather than by Britain. Anti-colonial movements in South Asia had not transferred power to the majority working classes. Instead, local elites retained their power beyond decolonization, using predatory capitalist economic practices to expand their riches and suppress worker – peasant resistance. Applying this integrated understanding of imperialism and capitalism to the political culture of Kashmir, expatriate political activists perceived India and Pakistan as imperial powers with no interest in the welfare of Kashmiris, looking only to ensure their domination over Kashmir's territory by co-opting political elites.⁴⁰

The UKLF's manifesto, *Kashmir: India, Pakistan, or Independence*, called for a revolutionary movement to transform Kashmir's social and economic organization and lay the foundation for a prosperous and independent country of Jammu and Kashmir. The UKLF aimed to detach the Valley from India's control and establish a socialist government in free Kashmir. In one of their pamphlets, the UKLF taught Kashmiris that peasants, workers, and laborers would lead the revolutionary movement in Jammu and Kashmir. The UKLF sought to end the imperial domination of India and Pakistan and to eliminate the social and economic disparities in Kashmiri society. Imagining a revolutionary struggle that would overthrow imperial rule and capitalist domination, the party believed that initiating a revolution in Kashmir could topple the old structures of power and lay the basis for a new class-free society.⁴¹

Although the UKLF provided a theoretical vision of Kashmir's revolutionary struggle, the party members agreed that the British Kashmiris could not bring about a revolution; they could only provide diplomatic and political support to a revolutionary party in Kashmir. They expressed concern about the absence of strictly revolutionary parties on both sides of the cease-fire line. UKLF believed that every political party in Pakistani-administered Kashmir had a flawed outlook or lacked a clear-cut agenda. In their perceptions, even political groups like the Plebiscite Front operating on both sides of divided Kashmir were nationalist organizations that advocated the idea of self-determination, but followed the moderate politics that had failed to bring any resolution to the dispute.⁴² The UKLF decided that though the Plebiscite Front in Pakistan spoke of a socialist outlook, its failure to provide a clear-cut plan for a future socialist revolution meant that the organization wanted to continue the existing feudal structures. Members of the UKLF were convinced that revolutionary combat as observed in other international movements for liberation was the only way to gain Kashmir's freedom.⁴³

Imagining alternatives with revolutionary metaphors

The idea of armed struggle to achieve Kashmir's freedom in the 1970s was not conceived in the diasporic space. In the late 1960s, several strands of Kashmiri resistance in the subcontinent had experimented with the radical approach to freedom, disappointed with the moderate stance of Kashmiri leaders, who had failed to attain self-determination. In Indian-administered Kashmir, local resistance groups like the Al-Fatah dominated mostly by students from middle-class families studying in professional colleges had operated a low-profile armed movement without Pakistan's support. To secure weapons for their extremist agenda, often its members indulged in organized bank robberies, or in certain cases snatched weapons from the security forces.⁴⁴ As it was an amateur movement without adequate planning, the government arrested its members and destroyed its cells, within a few years of its creation. Across the cease-fire line, the Jammu and Kashmir National Liberation Front (JKNLF), the pro-independence party that had networks of support on both sides of Kashmir had also flirted with radical methods to bring Kashmir's freedom.⁴⁵

A shift in the political climate of the subcontinent in the 1970s brought the revolutionary activity in Indian-administered Kashmir to a standstill. The India-Pakistan War of 1971 led to the dismemberment of Pakistan and changed the dynamics of power in South Asia, with India emerging as a dominant power.⁴⁶ This had a profound impact on the Plebiscite Front, a party formed in the 1950s that advocated self-determination, convincing its leaders that the regional balance of power had swung decisively in India's favor.⁴⁷ The Plebiscite Front leadership, now in the process of negotiating with the Indian government an agreement to accept Kashmir as an integral part of India, thought it prudent to appease the radicalized student community. Cases against the Al-Fatah student activists were terminated and some of them were co-opted and given important positions within the administration.⁴⁸ However, the acknowledgment of the finality of Jammu and

Kashmir's accession with India was rejected by a large section of Kashmiris, who suspended revolutionary activity by adapting to the new geopolitical realities of the subcontinent, but continued protests and demonstrations.⁴⁹ The state administration responded by imposing draconian laws to curb resistance, including the Public Safety Ordinance Act (1977) that provided the state power to detain individuals in the interests of security for two years, without providing the grounds of detention.⁵⁰ While Kashmiris in the Valley feared retaliation from a coercive state machinery, expatriate Kashmiris, far away from the stifling political atmosphere of the homeland found it feasible to debate possibilities of radical resistance.

The UKLF activists wanted to provide a blueprint of protracted guerilla warfare based on other international revolutionary struggles that would have the support of ordinary Kashmiris and would ultimately unite the two divided parts of Kashmir. On the home front, Kashmiri activists radicalized by the continuous suppression of rights and liberty and the complete indifference of India and Pakistan in resolving the Kashmir issue perceived armed struggle as a reassertion of autonomous will and evidence of a determination to pursue an independent course. In Britain, some members of the UKLF supported the pro-independence revolutionaries but searched for a third option that would free Kashmiris from dependence on Pakistan and allow them to chart a new route to free Kashmir. Exposed to the revolutionary articles in the *Red Mole* and the *Black Dwarf*, the UKLF activists expressed support for all armed struggles as the only way to challenge imperialism and alter the old social structures that prevented change.⁵¹

Inspired by these international revolutionary movements, the members of the UKLF initially imagined converting Kashmir into another Vietnam. The British Kashmiris could relate to the experiences of the Vietnamese, who were struggling to end the occupation by the French and Japanese. The agreement signed with the French "stipulated a cease-fire for the peaceful withdrawal of French forces and the temporary division of Vietnam along the seventeenth parallel (which split the country into communist North Vietnam and noncommunist South Vietnam)," ⁵² a division that echoed Kashmir's cease-fire line. The failure of the international community to uphold the Geneva Conference of 1954 and to conduct the general democratic election in Vietnam in 1956, which would have reunited the country under one government, also resonated for the UKLF, who saw a connection with the denial of plebiscite in Kashmir. Elections were held only in South Vietnam, rather than countrywide because the United States was afraid that communists might win. The limited elections led the communist sympathizers in South Vietnam, supported by North Vietnam, to establish "the National Liberation Front, also known as the Viet Cong, in 1960 to use guerrilla warfare against the South Vietnamese."⁵³ To provide a base to launch a struggle for the reunification of Jammu and Kashmir, the members of the UKLF also suggested setting up a free government – in Pakistani-administered Kashmir. Like Vietnam, Kashmiris would have their armies that would free the Valley from bondage.⁵⁴

While exploring these strategies for securing Kashmir's freedom, certain contradictions emerged within the political stance of the transnational UKLF. Some of its members expressed concern that although they considered the governments

in Pakistani-administered Kashmir to be puppet regimes put in place to toe Pakistan's political line, they did not address how Kashmiris could gain freedom from Pakistan's control. They focused on setting the Valley free and wanted to use Pakistani-administered Kashmir as a base camp for attaining freedom for the Valley. They reiterated that the only solution for the Kashmir conflict was to erase the cease-fire line and reunite Jammu and Kashmir. Initially, they were less critical of Pakistan's role in Kashmir and considered Pakistan sympathetic to their demand for self-determination.⁵⁵ This stance changed after the Ganga Hijacking Case, when a group of radical pro-independence Kashmiris claiming to represent Jammu Kashmir National Liberation Front (JKNLF) hijacked a plane en route from Kashmir to Delhi and brought it to Pakistan. Although it was done with the intent to internationalize the Kashmir issue, this event put tremendous strain on Pakistan's military regime because it occurred at a time when the Bengalis of East Pakistan were demanding provincial autonomy supported by neighboring India. New Delhi utilized the Ganga incident to ban Pakistani planes from the use of Indian air space that was the only direct and quickest connection between the two parts of Pakistan. This provoked the military regime of Pakistan to argue that the Indian intelligence agencies maneuvered the hijacking to widen the gulf between East and West Pakistan, and the pro-independence Kashmiri groups were thereafter suppressed, arrested, and detained.⁵⁶

The idea of independent Kashmir had no space in political discourse in Pakistan, and Pakistan's military regime clamped down on Kashmiris who advocated independence. Their mindset deeply affected by this, the UKLF's prominent leaders came together to forge transnational links with the homeland and play a constructive role in helping the pro-independence activists by collecting funds for the legal defense of the Kashmiris tried in the Ganga Hijacking Case. At the same time, the group organized protests, demonstrations, and campaigns to counter the propaganda unleashed by Pakistan's military regime, which portrayed the accused in the hijacking of the Ganga as "double agents." Clandestine leaflets and posters published in Britain circulated widely in Pakistan and Pakistani-administered Kashmir, portraying the accused as freedom fighters who had dedicated their lives to Kashmir's freedom.⁵⁷ Individuals like Yunus Taryaby and Master Abdul Majeed became convinced that Pakistan wanted to control Kashmir as much as India controlled the Valley. These individuals argued that the British Kashmiris should rethink its strategy for gaining Kashmir's freedom, as Pakistan would not allow an independent Kashmir. Refusing to be tools of any "imperial power," these individuals decided to take radical measures and imagine alternatives for freeing Kashmir from both India and Pakistan.⁵⁸

During these debates and counter-debates, some members of the UKLF came across a proscribed book, *Kashmir's War for Freedom*, written in 1970 and published in England. It contained a well-crafted plan for Kashmir's freedom.⁵⁹ The author was Dr Abdul Basit, a young Kashmiri lawyer, originally from the Valley. Basit provided a vision for freedom that could put an end to the mentality of dependence on Pakistan and lay the basis for an independent state with immense strategic value. The main purpose of the armed struggle in this plan was to bring

about a psychological transformation to the mindset of Kashmiris and inculcate a feeling of self-reliance in them.⁶⁰ Referring to Kashmir's history, he stated that centuries of slavery had crushed Kashmiri initiative and self-confidence. The other communities within the subcontinent viewed them with contempt because of their pacifist nature. This had created a culture of dependence among Kashmiris; they had allowed their oppressors to subjugate them. This mentality, he believed, continued even in the postcolonial era. India and Pakistan reinforced this pacifist image of Kashmiris to prevent them from launching an overt resistance. Basit repeatedly emphasized that "organizing into a cohesive fighting force a people whose entire history is devoid of any organized armed struggle" would require planning and effort.⁶¹ The cultural regeneration of the masses is an extremely vital element in undertaking a people's struggle. The armed struggle would change the submissive personality of the Kashmiris. It would make Kashmiris realize that they can be masters of their own destiny.

Kashmir's War for Freedom explicated a strong plan of action to attain Kashmir's freedom. There was immense potential in the concept of "Azad Kashmir as a springboard of operations" to drive India's occupation army out of Kashmir, yet any attempt to restore the sovereignty of Azad Kashmir to the people entailed grave risks of "repressive reprisals on the model of Jordon's savage crackdown on Palestinian freedom-fighters."⁶² Pakistan would view the rise of a self-sustaining liberation movement in Kashmir as a threat to its interests. The goal, then, was to convince Pakistanis to think broadly and focus on the deeper challenges that face them. The book was written prior to the creation of Bangladesh, at a time when tensions between East and West Pakistan had reached new heights. The author addressed in detail the widening emotional gap between East Pakistan and Kashmir. In East Pakistan, the Kashmir conflict "did not resonate in the same existential way" as it did among West Pakistanis, especially Punjabis.⁶³ The politically aware in East Pakistan, Basit argued, resented West Pakistan's deep interest in Kashmir. Many Bengalis felt that West Pakistan gave too much importance to the Kashmir issue, while ignoring the grievances of East Pakistan. Given these political tensions, he argued it would be in the national interest of Pakistan to focus less on the Kashmir issue, but divert its energies on mending relations with East Pakistan.⁶⁴ To win the moral support of Pakistani citizens, Basit suggested, Kashmir's pro-independence groups should distribute literature and organize conferences to convince Pakistanis that Kashmiris are not agents of any outside country but members of a nation struggling to find its voice in its quest for freedom. This approach was necessary, as it would prevent the Pakistani political and military elite from unleashing its propaganda machinery to discredit them.⁶⁵ Basit's strategy focused on developing close relations with the Chinese to seek training from them in the art of prolonged resistance. China could provide them with a "protected area" that would be a base for Kashmiri patriots to learn the art of prolonged revolutionary resistance.⁶⁶

In 1973 these ideas generated interest among certain members of the UKLF, like Younus Taryaby, Fazal Haq, and Master Abdul Majeed, who were contemplating new plans for Kashmir's independence after the trial and arrest of

pro-independence Kashmiris in Pakistan. Younus Taryaby suggested an end to the “dual occupation” of Jammu and Kashmir, instead of only focusing on freeing the Valley from India.⁶⁷ He also rejected the idea of plebiscite and considered it a deliberate ploy between India and Pakistan to keep Kashmiris subservient. Playing the plebiscite card, according to him, meant marching to the tune of India or Pakistan.⁶⁸ However, others within the organization, including Nazir Nazish, considered it practical to support pro-plebiscite groups in Britain that had a support base in the South Asian subcontinent and could play an active role in initiating a movement for Kashmir’s liberation. This difference in political perceptions caused a split within the UKLF; certain members decided to support a more moderate approach to Kashmir’s freedom. Others like Younas Taryaby felt that it was time to make a bold move, declare both nations as occupiers, and lay the foundations of a new organization, the Kashmir Workers Association (KWA) to broaden the scope of the movement and address the challenges faced by the Kashmiri community in Britain.⁶⁹

Meanwhile, in the diasporic space, other Kashmiri transnational organizations had emerged that wanted to play an active role in shaping Kashmiri resistance in the South Asian subcontinent. One such group was the Plebiscite Front of Britain, made up of individuals who belonged to the clan of Khaliq Ansari, the preeminent, pro-independence Kashmiri political activist from Pakistani-administered Kashmir. This group not only held on to the prospect of the plebiscite as an ideal way to attain Kashmir’s freedom but also offered support to pro-independence Kashmiri political activists from the Indian subcontinent, who were reaching the shores of England after the Pakistani military regime had initiated a campaign of suppression against them after the Ganga Hijacking Case of 1971.⁷⁰ The sense of a diasporic Kashmiri identity was becoming internally fraught as disagreements about strategy threatened to overwhelm the otherwise wide agreement on Kashmir’s liberation.

Territorial nationalism and the idea of independent Kashmir

The tensions and contradictions within the transnational discourse on freedom came to the forefront once the Kashmiri political activists from Pakistani-administered Kashmir arrived in Britain, after advocating Kashmir’s independence within the subcontinent. One particular individual, Amanullah Khan, had an outsize effect in mobilizing the British Kashmiris to play an active role in Kashmir’s freedom. Born in the Astore area of Gilgit, Amanullah Khan belonged to a family of traders who migrated to Jammu in the 1920s. He received his basic education in the Valley and graduated from Sri Pratap College at Srinagar in 1952. The denial of rights during the Dogra regime inspired Khan to participate in the movement led by Sheikh Abdullah to end Dogra autocracy. However, after Kashmir acceded to India, he was disappointed to witness continued political suppression in Kashmir. In 1952, he migrated to Pakistan and obtained a degree in law from Karachi University. His literary skills drew him to journalism and eventually to starting his newspaper: *Voice of Kashmir*.⁷¹

Khan's exposure to the Palestinian and Algerian freedom movements through the diasporic leadership based in Pakistan shaped his political worldview. In Pakistan, he kept company with Muhammad Kaloo, one of the leaders of the revolutionary Algerian National Liberation Front, whose party had waged a war of independence against France. Kaloo's policy of zero tolerance toward any form of imperialism and his preference for armed struggles to end forced occupations helped Amanullah formulate his political agenda. Access to the Algerian revolutionary literature convinced him that Kashmir's freedom struggle had to be waged on three fronts with three distinct goals: to dislodge the foothold of "imperialist" India, to convince Pakistan to grant Kashmir's independence, and to blunt the impact of the pliant regimes that toed the political line of both nation-states.⁷² In the 1960s, he and Maqbool Butt formed the National Liberation Front to wage a self-sustained armed movement for Kashmir's independence. When this movement disintegrated after the Ganga Hijacking Case of 1971, Amanullah traveled to Britain to continue the freedom struggle in the global arena.

One of the challenges before Khan was to unite the different strands of the British Kashmiris and articulate a common vision for Kashmir's freedom. Although the majority of the British Kashmiris were prepared to follow his lead because of his active involvement in Kashmir's freedom struggle in the subcontinent, some had political disagreements with him. The KWA suggested that expatriate Kashmiris in Britain should lay down a revolutionary program, rather than holding onto the slogan of "plebiscite." To adopt a broad policy that could unite all Kashmiris, Amanullah Khan proposed a separate political party in 1977, the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) that would advocate for an independent Kashmir on a global level.⁷³

To popularize the ideology of the JKLF among the British Kashmiris, Khan published an illustrated Urdu/English weekly called *Voice of Kashmir*. Printed in Birmingham from 1977, the weekly provided Khan with a perfect medium for expounding his views on the Kashmir dispute. Filled with stories of Palestinian and Algerian revolutionary struggles, the paper was designed to stir Kashmiris to launch an armed struggle for Kashmir's freedom. Article after article extolled Kashmiri Muslims to emulate the courage and commitment of the Palestinian revolutionaries in attaining freedom. Credit was given to Al-Fatah, a Palestinian political and military organization founded by Yasser Arafat in 1958, for reviving the Palestinian cause, which the world community had conveniently ignored. Despite the challenge of reuniting and reviving the Palestinian identity among widely dispersed Palestinians, the Al-Fatah remained committed to initiating a Palestinian national movement on a new basis. The main inspiration for the Kashmiri activists was how the Palestinian organization succeeded in launching its independence movement, despite efforts of the Arab governments to dominate them. This struck a chord among the Kashmiri political activists seeking to free themselves from Pakistan's hegemony in initiating their movement for independence. Also, extremely attractive to Kashmiri political activists was Fatah's insistent preaching of direct armed action to restore human dignity. Khan also expressed solidarity with the peoples of Rhodesia and South Africa fighting racism and the

National Liberation Front of Eritrea resisting autocratic policies of their ruling regime.⁷⁴ Drawing legitimacy from these movements of self-determination, Amanullah, emphasized that in the context of Kashmir, the non-violent approach had failed. The only way to attain freedom was through an armed struggle. The armed struggle would force India and Pakistan to pay heed to their aspirations. To popularize this ideology among the British Kashmiris, the JKLF constructed a new Kashmiri national flag and displayed a map of Kashmir in their publications.⁷⁵ The party also set up a pirate radio station, *Sada-i-Kashmir* (Voice of Kashmir), which transmitted revolutionary broadcasts to Kashmiris living in England and Scotland.⁷⁶

In the late 1970s and 1980s, there was a gradual increase in support for the JKLF ideology of independent Kashmir in Britain. The leading elements of the JKLF were drawn from individuals of diverse class, social, and regional backgrounds, with many having middle-class origins. As the support base of the JKLF became larger and broader, it ushered in an era of diasporic mass politics, involving more people in the political movement for Kashmir's freedom. With a wide support base in Britain, the JKLF published and distributed a series of pamphlets and newsletters among Kashmiri expatriates in Europe and America to seek their support for an independent Jammu and Kashmir state that would reunite its three parts: Indian-administered Kashmir, Pakistani-administered Kashmir, and the Northern regions of Gilgit and Baltistan. They conceived the united independent state to be neutral, secular, and federal. A neutral Kashmir would have friendly relations with all major powers surrounding its boundaries, thus ensuring peace in the region, while a secular and federal Jammu and Kashmir would ensure that all communities and subregions have religious freedom and a voice in shaping the nation-state's future.⁷⁷

The aim of the JKLF leaders was not merely to mobilize Kashmiris but to alter the public opinion in India and Pakistan, convincing them that an independent Kashmir was in the national interest of all parties involved. To achieve that goal, JKLF refuted the criticism voiced in the nationalist presses of India and Pakistan that granting independence to Jammu and Kashmir would strengthen the "separatist" movements in the subcontinent and lead to the balkanization of India and Pakistan. Making a case for Kashmir's uniqueness, the JKLF clarified that the "freedom movement" in Kashmir could not be compared with the separatist movements in other parts of the Indian subcontinent.⁷⁸ The international dimensions of the Kashmir conflict and the endorsement of the Kashmiri right of self-determination by the United Nations set it apart from other dissident states in India. Additionally, they argued that the state of Jammu and Kashmir was constitutionally not a part of India or Pakistan; the United Nations recognized the state's constitutional status through its maps of the region, which separated Jammu and Kashmir from India and Pakistan. If India and Pakistan wanted to stop the separatist movements in their respective countries, they should address the justifiable grievances of the people. If the state ignored those grievances, irrespective of the outcome of the freedom movement in Kashmir, the regional separatist movements would succeed. Furthermore, independence for Kashmir was the sole

viable option that would not hurt the national esteem of either India or Pakistan. Pakistan would be contented that “Muslim majority Jammu and Kashmir has been freed from Indian occupation” and India would be “elated that the region has not become a part of Pakistan.”⁷⁹ The resolution of the Kashmir dispute would end waste on defense expenditures and both nations could focus on development and economic progress.

To win the support of the myriad cultural and linguistic communities that inhabited Jammu and Kashmir, the party promised “final freedom” to every individual, “according to his or her choice to practice their religious, political, and economic principles.” The JKLF aspired to set up a democratic form of government where there would be no discrimination based on religion and in which there would be economic equity and social equality. However, they added, no law would be enacted which was against Islam’s basic principles. To appease its diverse subregions, the JKLF promised that independent Kashmir would have a federal parliamentary style of government to negotiate the political, linguistic, and religious demands of Kashmir’s communities and subregions.⁸⁰

After that position garnered support in India, Pakistan, and Kashmir itself, another matter that the JKLF hoped to confront was the way the world community interpreted the Kashmir issue. Instead of considering national freedom for Kashmiris, Kashmir was viewed internationally as a territorial dispute between two countries, because India and Pakistan had succeeded in “dressing the issue of Kashmir in a cloak of their own interest.”⁸¹ The world community did not wish to embroil itself in controversy by meddling in a bilateral issue. The party considered it imperative to dismantle these notions and initiate a diplomatic effort through conferences, public conventions, and personal contact with ambassadors and foreign dignitaries to generate global awareness about Kashmiri views.⁸² Ironically, this united independent vision for Jammu and Kashmir, like any nationalism, argued for a rigid, monolithic concept of sovereignty. Although the philosophy of the JKLF claimed to ensure religious freedom and federal status, it ignored the reality that many subregions and minorities within the state, despite these assurances, would prefer to be a part of India.

Meanwhile, independence politics had become a major topic of debate among British Kashmiris. While propagating their ideology in the global arena, the JKLF also mobilized the British Kashmiris to seek the release of Kashmiri freedom fighters held in various jails of the subcontinent because of their political beliefs, which conflicted with the national interests of India and Pakistan. In 1984 an underground transnational organization, National Liberation Army, kidnapped an Indian diplomat to force India to negotiate for the release of a prominent Kashmiri political activist, Maqbool Bhat, whom the Indian courts had sentenced to death for endangering the security of the country.⁸³ As the Indian government refused to negotiate, the members of the National Liberation army murdered the Indian diplomat.⁸⁴ After this incident, there was strong pressure from India on Britain to curtail the activities of pro-independence groups in Kashmir, and this alerted the British government of the need to increase its surveillance of Kashmiri activists. In 1985, the British police arrested Amanullah Khan and held him

for 15 months on charges of bomb making and other illegal activities. None of these charges could be proved in the court and in December 1986, the British government had to acquit him of all charges, however, they still deported him to Pakistan.⁸⁵

Amanullah's deportation to Pakistan opened a new chapter in Kashmir's resistance movement. Pakistan's intelligence agencies established contacts with Khan to take advantage of the political discontent brewing in Indian-administered Kashmir. Even though JKLF's agenda of independent Kashmir conflicted with ISI's stance of Kashmir's integration with Pakistan, Amanullah considered it prudent to form an alliance to execute a successful indigenous armed revolt against India. A section of the British Kashmiris strongly disagreed with this plan. They firmly believed this would mean carrying forward the Pakistani agenda in the Valley in the name of independence. This type of insurgency, they argued, was not guerilla warfare and could lead to civilian casualties. Despite the resistance to this idea, Khan went ahead with his secret work with the ISI, causing a deep rift within the JKLF in Britain. Many members resigned, as they believed Amanullah Khan had compromised the party's core ideology of a self-sustained struggle for independence.⁸⁶ However, Amanullah's plan would prove to be successful in the late 1980s; the repressive political climate in Indian-administered Kashmir and the dramatic global transformations brought about by the end of the Cold War set the stage for Kashmiri radicalization.

Throughout the 1980s, in response to the growing regionalism in India, Delhi took a hard approach against mainstream Kashmiri leadership and their demands for autonomy. In Indian-administered Kashmir, the state governments were undermined to ensure that only parties or leaders who toed Delhi's line held power.⁸⁷ The continuous denial of democracy, the suppression of civil liberties, and rigging of elections in Indian-administered Kashmir completely alienated Kashmiri youth, leaving them prepared to take up arms against India.⁸⁸ Furthermore, the global events unfolding in the late 1980s ultimately inspired Kashmiri youth to take a radical approach to alter the status quo. The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the unification of East and West Germany created hope among Kashmiris that it might be possible to reunite Kashmir.⁸⁹ Similarly, the success of the scrappy and resource limited Afghan mujahideen against the powerful and well-armed Soviet Union made Kashmiris realize that strong nations could be defeated.⁹⁰ A group of Kashmir activists who had lost faith in Indian democracy trekked the high mountain passes to cross over into Pakistani-administered Kashmir, searching for weapons to challenge India's domination. There, these young Kashmiris met Amanullah Khan, head of the JKLF, who convinced them to embrace the idea of independent Kashmir as the only viable solution for ultimate peace in the region.

The JKLF was successful in initiating a full-fledged insurgency against the Indian state that transformed into a mass upsurge for freedom. Kashmiris mesmerized by the sentiment of freedom participated in massive demonstrations that stunned not only the insurgents, but also shocked Indians and Pakistanis. Pakistan that had supported the JKLF in initiating the insurgency in the Valley now seemed

fearful that the independent ideology of the JKLF would sideline their interests in the Valley. It decided to abandon JKLF and partner with Islamist militant groups that would provide a religious rationale for Kashmir's accession to Pakistan and define the armed struggle against India as a holy war – a jihad.⁹¹

The marginalization of the JKLF in the Valley was accompanied by the suppression of the organization in Pakistani-administered Kashmir. The tensions between Amanullah Khan, the leader of the JKLF and Pakistan intelligence agencies intensified on February 11, 1992, after Amanullah Khan, led a symbolic peaceful mass crossing of the border between Pakistani-administered Kashmir and Indian-administered Kashmir to prove the irrelevance of the line of control. Some individuals from the British Kashmiris "traveled to Pakistani-administered Kashmir to participate in the action," providing worldwide publicity for this event. The Indian government reacted to the plans by sealing off border villages and imposing dawn-to-dusk curfew. On the Pakistan side of Kashmir, "almost 10,000 people participated," despite crackdowns by the Pakistani army that led to the death of seven Kashmiris and injured several others.⁹² This event inspired protest demonstrations by the British Kashmiris in various parts of the world and intensified support for Kashmir's independence.

In the post insurgency era, the British Kashmiris reframed the Kashmir question in the international arena by placing it in the context of human rights violations in Indian-administered Kashmir. India adopted a tough stance in the wake of Kashmiri resistance, failing to differentiate between insurgents and civilians in protecting India's territorial integrity.⁹³ The state violence unleashed in Indian-administered Kashmir allowed the British Kashmiris to question India's legitimacy in Kashmir and compel the world community to take a moral stance on Kashmir. To attain this objective, some diasporic groups articulated their views to British parliamentarians, who set up committees like the Kashmir Human Rights Committee (KHRC) and the All-Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group, where members of the British Parliament from constituencies with heavy Kashmiri population, beholden to Kashmiri voters, became compelled to take a stand against the abuses in Kashmir.⁹⁴ The Labour Party that had not taken any official stance on Kashmir, feeling pressure from the British Kashmiri voting bank in 1995, made an official pledge to Kashmiris to "accept its [Britain's] responsibility as the former imperial power in the dispute" and "recognize that it is under an obligation to seek a solution" based on "commitment to peace, democracy, human rights, and mutual tolerance."⁹⁵ Banking on this pledge, during the 1997 general elections the British Kashmiris offered the Labour Party electoral support if they supported the Kashmiri call for self-determination. The All Party International Kashmir Coordination Committee, a conglomeration of fifteen major Kashmiri diasporic organizations, mobilized British Kashmiris to register as voters and make Kashmir's self-determination "a deciding factor in voting behavior."⁹⁶ This convinced British Kashmiris that they had achieved what the High Commission of Pakistan had failed to manage.⁹⁷ Presenting the Kashmir question in the light of human rights violations, the British Kashmiris succeeded in provoking questioning India's credibility by highlighting the failed relationship between state legitimacy and human rights.

After September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States by the Al-Qaeda network, the British Kashmiris faced new challenges. After 9/11, the international community had zero tolerance for any non-state group that supported the use of violence, even if it was perceived as a nationalist struggle. As the international war was focused on terrorist groups and the countries that supported them, India who had been accusing Pakistan of cross-border terrorism for quite a while, found it beneficial to link the Kashmir conflict to “Islamic extremism” to gain international support. It labeled Kashmiri civilian resistance as Islamic terrorism and intensified the suppression of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.⁹⁸

British Kashmiris countered this narrative by drawing attention to the militarized landscape of Kashmir dotted with army camps and bunkers within civilian neighborhoods that allowed the Indian military to carry out unrestrained detentions, surveillance, and torture of its citizens. The portrayal of Kashmiri resistance as “terrorism,” many in the diasporic space argued, provided India legitimacy to avoid international scrutiny and implement the “draconian Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) that gives soldiers the permission to shoot to kill with impunity.”⁹⁹ The Kashmiri expatriates initiated a diplomatic effort to generate global awareness about Kashmiri resistance so that it is not equated with Islamist terrorism. They organized demonstrations, including the 2014 “Million March” in Britain attended by hundreds and thousands of British and European Kashmiris to protest civilian killings in Indian-administered Kashmir.¹⁰⁰ Despite different visions for Kashmir’s political future, the British Kashmiris united in appealing to common humanity to secure basic human rights for Kashmiris.

Conclusion

As Kashmiris in the transnational community took the lead in changing international attitudes about political exclusion in their homeland, they maintained an emotional connection with Kashmir, which became not merely a geographical entity, but a territory both imagined and real in which true freedom was currently denied, but where a better future could be obtained through present-day sacrifice. Holding on to “Kashmir” as it existed prior to the creation of the cease-fire line, rather than releasing it in favor of identification with their host society motivated expatriates to invest time and resources in generating greater political awareness around their “occupied” homeland. By asserting a transnationally informed, stable sense of political identity, Kashmiri activists who came to Britain from the subcontinent after 1971 gave specific, practical shape to the generalized notions of freedom in broad circulation.

At present, Kashmiri expatriates are struggling to seek support from the international powers for India’s undemocratic policies in Kashmir, especially its unilateral decision to alter the status quo in the region. In August 2019 India placed Kashmir Valley under curfew and imposed a complete communication blackout before revoking Article 35A of the Indian Constitution, which authorized the Jammu and Kashmir state legislature to define its permanent residents and provide them exclusive rights, including the sole privilege to own and buy land in

Kashmir. Most Kashmiri Muslims across the line of control and in the broader diaspora see this decision as the long-standing Hindu nationalist policy to alter the demography in the region to bring about a final resolution. Yet, the global community seems intent on ignoring Kashmir for geopolitical and economic interests. The United States has downgraded its traditional ties with Pakistan and is not willing to upset India, its close ally against an assertive China. At the same time, the Muslim countries of the Middle East prefer to secure business investments in India, an important player in the present global economy. The deafening silence about Kashmir in the international arena, however, has not stopped Kashmiri transnational community from emphasizing that Jammu and Kashmir is an integral part of neither India nor Pakistan but belongs to the people of the state, who have the inherent right to shape their future as per their collective aspirations.

Notes

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9 Kashmir and the fire this time*

Niya Shahdad

Every summer in Kashmir begins with the question of fate. The sun, having traveled through a long, dormant winter, stretches wide open to mark the return of color and noise, electricity and traffic, cricket, weddings, song, and gluttony in our gardens. Desire and humor ride through town and for a moment we meet life, not as it is known to be but perhaps as it were meant to be, before the dice is rolled yet again: What will light the fire this time?

Around midnight on August 4, the night before India's Hindu nationalist government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi unilaterally erased Kashmir's autonomy, Srinagar, the largest city in Indian-controlled Kashmir, my home, and other parts of the Valley of Kashmir were beginning to be sealed into a valley of soldiers and checkpoints between which laid quiet, dimly lit homes, like mine, with their internet, phone lines, and cable television severed.

The week that led to this night began with the Indian government deploying tens of thousands of troops in Kashmir, already the world's most densely militarized zone and ended with the government's emergency evacuation of thousands of pilgrims, tourists, and nonresident students under the guise of a potential terror threat.

In between the troop deployment and the siege, Kashmiris – about seven million people – moved in all directions, stocking food, fuel, and cash under the weight and panic of what could happen tomorrow. Days of rumors, government orders, and denials began to settle into the shape of three probabilities: the end of Kashmir's autonomy, the beginning of a war with Pakistan, or both.

Terror, in its most primal form, is unleashed in Kashmir through the fine balance between what is made known and what is kept unknown. The final message of that fourth night of August arrived from the corner of a distant room, where an old, forsaken landline rang out of the dark. I rushed to answer it, but in a moment indicative of what was to come, it merely echoed my voice back to me. Home was now a space of siege beyond which we could neither see, nor hear, nor tell, nor move.

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I lay awake next to my mother and heard the moonless night oscillate between the sound of paramilitary trucks driving past our neighborhood and the sound of Beiga, the guardian of our home, walking barefoot through the house to check that our gates had locks on them. Now and then, my mother would turn from her sleep and ask, “Has something happened yet?”

The next morning, on August 5, in New Delhi, the Parliament of India passed the bill to erase our autonomy, statehood, and residency rights and privileges.

Inside a cloudless, blue sky in Srinagar, the blades of military helicopters circled above my roof like a typhoon, throwing me out of the hazy dream I had collapsed into and toward the window. I pushed it wide open and watched three black jets appear under the sun, flying above our garden and then over a skyline of poplar trees and crimson roofs, until they finally shrunk into the image of ravens touching the mountains that circle the city. Faint from the sound of battle and the misplaced beauty of the day, I sat on the windowsill, where a book that had been revisited more than once that week, lay abandoned at its quietest page: “Is this the promised end? Or an image of that horror?”

Downstairs, my aunt, Asifa, entered through a side door and alarmed us with her sudden arrival amid the curfew. My mother and I rose to our feet and asked her if something had gone wrong, but she continued to take off her shoes, in silence, and waited to sit herself down, on the carpet, before she could tell us in a steady, cautious voice, “They took him last night,” and then let go of her breath. Her husband, my 63-year-old uncle, a businessman and civil society leader, had been arrested by Indian forces.

Asifa spent the day repeating a crippled search for her husband that ended, each time, in between the two rows of troops that had seized the bridge in our neighborhood. The world outside had been reduced to 900 meters – about half a mile – into which my aunt would disappear, every couple of hours. Inside, we paced restlessly until she would return, safe, but quieter than the last time.

Late that evening, we remembered we still owned an aged radio that sometimes worked when placed at the right angle. I carried it into the living room, where my mother, my aunt and I waited in silence for the song to end. Then a stranger’s voice on Radio Kashmir broke the news to us: “*Modi Sarkar ne aaj Jammu Kashmir Riyasat ko daffa 370 ke tehat hasil khususi ayeeni taraji ko khatam karne ka faisla kiya hai*” (Modi government has decided to abolish the special status granted to the state of Jammu and Kashmir by Article 370 of the Constitution.)

There it was: the annexation of our land and of the life that has survived upon that land. We looked at one another as the stranger’s voice continued to pronounce our fate, and wept. My mother gulped her tears and said, to no one in particular, “Kashmir has been finished off.”

The days that followed were spent in the lonely presence of what we now knew and the vast absence of the freedom to respond to it. Time was measured by listening to the frequency of scattered traffic and planning the next hunt for news. But we remained trapped inside a sensation of stillness even as we climbed stairs, paced gardens, and walked back, empty-handed, from the bridge that only the river beneath it could cross. Home had turned into a large waiting room.

After dark, a battle would begin between the wild, stray dogs that claim the streets of our neighborhood for sleep and the troops that occupy them at every corner. The old gang of dogs barked, in chorus and in revolt, at the silent march of the half-masked, fully armed soldiers prying on their ground. Inside, even as we sat with food in our hands, cross-legged on the carpet for dinner; read verses from the Qur'an; made notes at the writing desk; or slept, with the doors locked and the curtains drawn, we remained under the patrol of the invisible, armed men because the dogs went on barking into the night. Once the barks stretched into howls, it meant the soldiers were returning from the further end of the road.

A few miles from my home, in the inner city, where the protests are more intense and the oppression harsher, the orbit of siege was made from tear gas and chilli grenades, lead pellets, and aerial fire. The soldiers barged into homes and stole teenage boys from their sleep. From dawn to dusk, Kashmir lay naked under the gaze and practice of almost a million Indian troops and policemen.

Four days into the siege, a local newspaper made it home. Beiga wanted me to search for reports on how the world had responded. But there were none, and for the first time in a weeklong daze, we felt a sensation of familiarity. Only upon leaving Kashmir, the following day, did I realize that there had also been no record of what, precisely, had happened there.

The newspaper was a document of silence.

It did not inform us that 17-year-old Osaib Altaf, cornered by soldiers on a footbridge, had jumped into the Jhelum River and died; that at least 2,000 people had been disappeared into prisons without charges; and that my uncle, one of them, was not in Kashmir but inside a jail in Agra. Nor would it be able to record, in the days to come, that 152 people had been injured by pellets and tear gas; that the family of Mohammad Ayub Khan, a 60-year-old salesman, found out after four days that tear gas fired by Indian troops had suffocated him to death; that a man walked 34 miles to call his son in New Delhi and let him know that his family was alive; that pharmacies were running short of lifesaving medicines and a young woman flew in from New Delhi and then walked 11 miles to bring insulin to her father; that Rozi, a widow, had a gun pointed to her head as she watched her 20-year-old son being carried away by soldiers; and that Fehmeeda Shagu's two children, who were being taught by her when tear gas canisters were fired into their home, now spend their days asking, "Why has Mama died?"

But inside my final evening in Kashmir, as I sat in our besieged garden, all I had within my hands were five newspaper pages of wedding cancellations. Soon, the silent day was separated from its silent night by a voice on the loudspeaker. It rode through town in a military jeep while announcing the fate of curfew: "Apne gharon mein se mat nikalna. Karwai ki jaayegi. (Don't step out of your homes. Action will be taken!)"

Beiga cursed them under his breath and then smiled at me weakly. "They won't let us out for very long this time," he said, lifting himself up to go inside, "Not before winter."

Only then did I think of the hazy, morning dream that I had been woken up from. Within it, the toothless madman from our neighborhood ran through a white

valley on its first day of winter and screamed the unbelievable truth, “Kashmir has come back! Kashmir has come back!” He danced with rapture and knocked on every door in town, trying to wake us to the miracle unfolding outside: snow fell and brought back every quarter of Kashmir that had been erased many seasons ago.

He danced alone.

10 Conclusion

Healing the wound

Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal

At the beginning of the twenty-first century Bill Clinton described Kashmir and, by extension, South Asia as the most “dangerous” place in the world. He warned Pakistanis of the comeuppance of people who try “redrawing borders with blood” and reduced the solution to the “Four R’s” of restraint, respect for the line of control, renunciation of violence and renewal of talks with India.¹ The problem in Kashmir is not about people trying to redraw borders with blood but the forcible imposition of borders where ties of blood spill across artificially created frontiers. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh came closer to the mark by suggesting that while borders cannot be redrawn, they can be made irrelevant. This had the merit of recognizing that tribal and clan-based ties in Indian- and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir defy the arbitrarily imposed line of control cutting across them.

If we want peace, and not simply the peace of the graveyard, the obsessive dimension in state-sponsored nationalisms, whether of the Indian or the Pakistani variety, must be exorcized. The focus has to be on human beings, not territory. If it is to be a living principle rather than a precious artifact stored away in the museum of postwar international relations, sovereignty will have to reconceptualized and reformulated to take account of shifting popular perspectives at the social base. These have been at fundamental variance with state-sponsored views of monolithic and indivisible sovereignty, not only in Kashmir but also elsewhere in the world. Lessons from South Asian history as a whole, and Kashmir in particular, point to the possibility of very different sorts of political accommodations. The fostering of Dogra sovereignty under the British replaced notions of shared sovereignty and flexible views of territorial jurisdiction with a rigid and unaccommodating idea of monolithic and non-negotiable sovereignty. Thus began a process which gathered momentum in the postcolonial period in inverse proportion to the relative strength of ruling configurations at the Center, whether in India or in Pakistan.

Under the terms of the British transfer of power in 1947, Kashmir had to choose, like the other 500-plus princely states, between the two dominions. Independence was not an option. In the wake of Muslim tribal incursions from the northwest frontier (which was surreptitiously abetted by Pakistan), Kashmir’s Dogra Maharajah, Hari Singh, decided to cast his lot with the predominantly Hindu Indian Union. The legality of the accession has never been accepted by

Pakistan. Its votaries have consistently accused the last British Viceroy of unfairly gifting away Kashmir to Jawaharlal Nehru by doctoring the Punjab Boundary Commission Award and allotting the crucial district of Gurdaspur with its bare Muslim majority to India. It has been this sense of wrong which has continued to fuel support for the Kashmir cause in Pakistan. The great Urdu short-story writer Saadat Hasan Manto hinted at the reasons why Pakistanis, and especially those with a Kashmiri ancestry, have felt so unable to accept the accession to India as a *fait accompli*. In a facetious letter to the Indian prime minister, he introduced himself as a fellow Kashmiri like Pandit Nehru. But unlike the pandit, Manto had never seen the whole of Kashmir. He noted that Nehru's family name implied that they had originated in a place near a *nahr* or river. By contrast, Manto's name came from the Kashmiri word *mant* which means a stone weighing one and a half *seers* – or roughly three pounds. Given the discrepancy in their relative power, how could Manto willingly drown himself in the Nehruvian river. Matters would have been quite different if he had weighed a few hundred tons. What was more, India was preventing Pakistan from getting its share of Himalayan river water because it controlled the source, namely Kashmir. Expressing his nostalgia for Kashmiri fruits and the cool climes of the valley, Manto asked Nehru to be reasonable as both of them were chips of the same regional brick.²

The independence option for Kashmir was first raised in 1948 when India quite as much as Pakistan paid lip service to self-determination for Kashmiris. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru himself promised a plebiscite despite his obsessive desire for Kashmir, once likening it to the “face of the beloved that one sees in a dream and that fades away on awakening.”³ Instead of fading, however, the object of unrequited love was to become his obsession. The Indian prime minister quickly retracted the promise of a plebiscite on grounds of Pakistan's occupation of “Azad Kashmir.” The more astute members of the international diplomatic community realized that so long as India and Pakistan had a stake in the plebiscite, the issue of demilitarization and the plebiscite administration would remain irresolvable. So it was suggested that Kashmiris ought to be given the option of independence. The security of an independent Kashmir could be guaranteed by India and Pakistan and provide a much-needed common bond for the development of their relations in other spheres. Some even proposed an Asian counterpart of Benelux countries in the form of KEBIPAK consisting of four sovereign states, Kashmir, East Bengal, India and Pakistan, forged by agreement on joint defense and economic union. There were rumors that Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, “a supreme realist” had “reached the conclusion that something drastic must be done to prevent” India–Pakistan relations “deteriorating still further.” He wanted India to “abandon her claim to Kashmir,” minus Jammu and do a deal with Pakistan over East Bengal, not so much as a straight exchange but by way of “a grant of guaranteed independence, which would allow these areas to come within the sphere of influence” of India and Pakistan respectively.⁴

It is worth mentioning that in 1948 Nehru was not at all averse to an independent Kashmir. Despite Mohammad Ali Jinnah's initial support for an independent Kashmir, Pakistani officialdom scoffed at the idea since it would almost certainly

be under the control of Sheikh Abdullah. But the more important reason why the idea was shelved were British and American fears at the height of the Cold War era that an independent Kashmir would be fertile ground for Soviet infiltration into the subcontinent. When the idea was partially revived in 1953–1954, it was the Soviet Union's turn to see it as an Anglo-American conspiracy to acquire bases in this strategically vital part of the subcontinent.

There is no reason why today a quasi-sovereign Kashmiri nation cannot exist within the framework of the larger and multinational sovereign states of India and Pakistan. The mode of addressing the social complexity in regions and subregions must be to layer sovereignty and not partition territory – a mechanism that brought on a human catastrophe in 1947 and a resort to which is almost certain to wreak havoc on vulnerable minorities. Sumantra Bose has suggested that in their search for a peace-building framework for Kashmir, South Asians may take a leaf or two out of the book of the Irish peace process.⁵ Brexit now threatens the Irish experiment of 1998, but the process had advanced much farther than is the case in the subcontinent. By modifying the model used in the Irish instance to suit subcontinental conditions, engagement can be envisaged along three axes – the New Delhi–Srinagar axis, the New Delhi–Islamabad axis and the Srinagar–Muzaffarabad axis. New Delhi had seemed willing and eager under Vajpayee to open new channels of communication with a wide array of groups in Kashmir, including those shunned until then as diehard militants. It also did a major rethink on its earlier stance on negotiations with Islamabad in summer 2001 as there seemed no prospect of long-term peace in Kashmir without bringing the Pakistani state on board. Most important, Kashmiris should be permitted to talk to one another across the line of control and the regional peoples of Jammu, Ladakh and the Kashmir Valley given a chance to arrive at an adjustment of their claims and counterclaims. The people of Kashmir have a long history of knowing how to live with difference; they need not be forced into communitarian ghettos.

By focusing on the human dimension of the problem rather than *jihad*, Pakistan might inch closer to attaining its objectives in Kashmir without jeopardizing its own security in the process. What does India have to gain from solving Kashmir? The prospect of ending a long and tiresome counterinsurgency in one of the world's most difficult terrains by deciding to invest part of what it believes are its current advantages vis-à-vis Pakistan in order to maximize its gains in the long run. How many more seasons have to come and go, how many more rivers of blood have to flow, before the two unimaginative states take the first steps to some sort of a regional arrangement aimed at better understanding and economic cooperation. The time has long past when the decolonization of the concept of monolithic sovereignty and the corresponding idioms of a singular and inclusionary nationalism, which has stunted creative thinking and been such a deadweight on subcontinental minds, could safely await India's and Pakistan's coming of age. There should be no letup in the pressure to move their governments toward the negotiating table in the expectation that, in due course, space will be created for them to engage with the representatives of the different groups in Kashmir to arrive at the modalities of a workable political accommodation. With that goal in

view, one can only pray for that ray of wisdom which can light a glimmer of hope for this long suffering, lost paradise on earth.

Muhammad Iqbal was not alone among the poets and publicists in Punjab who eloquently supported the Kashmiri cause. Among other notable Kashmiris based in Punjab who kept alive hopes of turning the tide of Dogra despotism was Mohammad Din Fauq, editor of the *Kashmiri Magazine*, who wrote:

Every corner of Kashmir is like heaven
Each part of Kashmir holds the secrets of nature

...

Every particle of my Kashmir is hospitable
Even the stones along the way gave me water.⁶

In a piece written in Lahore on November 9, 1952, commemorating the great Kashmiri poet Mahjoor, the Urdu short-story writer Saadat Hasan Manto found it odd that Pakistan and India were fighting over Kashmir and the United Nations was trying to mediate.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru is a Kashmiri [like me] and loves Kashmir as I do . . . like any other Kashmiri does . . . if Mahjoor had been alive today I think there would have been no need for Dr Graham.⁷

The sentiment is still alive today. It needs to be seized upon so that a post-national solution can be reached in Kashmir based on principles transcending the sterile hubris of territorial nationalisms of the Indian, Pakistani and Kashmiri assortments.

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Index

Note: Page numbers in *italics* indicate a figure on the corresponding page.

- 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 13 85
- 2014 floods 62–63
- aazadi see azadi*
- Abdullah, Farooq 104
- Abdullah, Omar 58, 62
- Abdullah, Sheikh Mohammad 2, 4, 5, 11, 29, 56, 128
- affective governance 54, 55, 56, 57, 59
- Afghanistan 15, 39, 74
- Afghans 18, 96, 132
- Ahmadis 3, 5
- Ahmed, Zareef 26
- Ahrars 3, 4, 5, 6
- ajoooba* 86, 87
- Al-Fatah 124, 129
- Algerian National Liberation Front 129
- Ali, Agha Shahid 19, 20, 68n1, 116
- Allama *see* Iqbal, Muhammad
- All-India Kashmir Committee 4–5
- All-India Kashmiri Samaj 111
- All-India Majlis-i-Ahrar 5
- All-Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group 133
- Al-Qaeda 134
- Altaf, Osaib 141
- Ansari, Khaliq 128
- Arafat, Yasser 129
- Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) 111, 134
- Article 249 2
- Article 35A 108, 109, 110, 134
- Article 306A 2
- Article 356 2
- Article 357 2
- Article 370 1, 12, 36, 50, 108, 140
- Asia Watch 93
- atoot ang* 108
- Aurangzeb 96
- Ayodhya 2
- azadi* 8, 18, 22, 25, 38, 47, 53, 72, 92, 104, 111, 112
- Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) *see* Azad Kashmir
- Azad Kashmir 7, 10, 12, 13, 14, 37, 38, 42, 46, 48, 49, 50, 75, 127
- Azad, Maulana Abul Kalam 5
- Bacha-Bhattas* 100
- Baharistan-i Shahi* 94
- Bandipora 72, 76, 77, 78, 81, 85, 86
- Basit, Abdul 126
- Beg, Aslam 12
- Behen, Sarla 23
- Bengal 1
- Berlin Wall 132
- Bey, Hakim 20
- Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) 107
- Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) 1, 2, 12, 71, 83
- Bharat Mata* 108
- Bhat, Maqbool 53, 131
- Bhat, Motilal 102
- Bhimber 38
- Bhonsle, Rahul 57
- Bhutto, Benazir 11, 12
- Bhutto, Zulfikar Ali 122
- biraderi* 10, 13, 119
- Black Dwarf* 123, 125
- blogging 20; *see also* social media
- Body of Victim, Body of Warrior* 40
- Border Roads Organization (BRO) 81
- Brahmins or Brahmans 95, 96, 99
- British Kashmiris 117, 120, 121, 122, 129, 133
- Buddhism 14, 37, 94
- Bühler, George 96, 99, 100, 101
- Butt, Maqbool 129

- Catch* 22 21
 censorship 49
 Center for Peace, Development and Reforms 40
 Central Reserve for Peace and Development 103
 Chenab River 76
 children 59, 60
 China 13, 21, 36, 49, 71, 127, 135
 chinara trees 21, 28
 Chitkara, M. G. 83
 Chowdhury, Kundan Lal 104
 Chrangoo, Ajay 111
 CNN IBN 63
 Commonwealth Immigration Acts 118
 "Correspondent, The" 116
 cultural identity 97
 "Cups of nun chai" 7, 16, 23, 25

 Delhi Agreement 2
 Delhi High Court 105
 dependency 53–56, 65, 66
 Dogra rulers 3, 4, 34, 37, 96, 98, 99, 128
 drill and blast method (DBM) 79
 Drug De-Addiction Centre (DDC) 61
 Dhar, K. N. 96
 Dhar, Triloki Nath 107

 Erie Canal 82

 Five-Year Plans 57
 Fotedar, Shiv Narain 107

 Gallup Pakistan 48
 Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand 30, 33
 Ganga Hijacking Case of 1971 126, 128, 129
 Gaw Kadal 103, 104
 Gilgit-Baltistan 36, 37, 38, 40, 50, 53, 64, 68n1
 Gorbachev, Mikhail 12
 gratitude 54–56, 62, 66
 Guevara, Che 123
 Gurez 78, 87

 Haider, Raja Farooq 39
 HALCRO 80
Half-inch Himalayas 39
 Handoo, P. K. 105, 106
 Haq, Fazal 127
 HCC 79, 82
 Head Race Tunnel (HRT) 72, 74, 79, 85
 heart warfare 57–58
 Heller, Joseph 21
hijrat 39
 Hindu 37; *see also* Kashmiri Pandits
 Hindustan Construction Company 72
 Hizbul Mujahideen 39, 45, 47, 48
 Human Rights Watch 43, 50
 Hurriyat Conference 111

 "Ikwhan" 25
 Ikwhan 78
 immobility 72, 74, 87
 independence 11, 13–15, 16, 38, 48, 53, 58, 63, 99, 117, 123, 126, 128–131, 133, 143–144
 India 1, 8, 10, 11 116
 Indian journalism 24, 63–66
 Indian militarized care 54, 56, 58, 59, 61, 62, 63, 66
 Indian Union 1, 2, 3, 11, 12, 14, 72
 India-occupied Kashmir *see makbooz*
 Kashmir
 India-Pakistan War: of 1948 118; of 1965 120–121; of 1971 124
 'Indic, the' 97
 Indic Kashmir 99
 Indus 83
 Indus River 71
 Indus Water Treaty (IWT) 7, 71, 74, 75, 76, 78
insaniyat 2
 International Marxist Group (IMG) 121, 122
 Iqbal, Muhammad 3, 4, 5, 9
 Islamabad 12, 15, 49, 53
 Islamic Republic of Pakistan 37
 Islamist organizations 48

 Jacomine, Luca 79
 Jagmohan 92, 103, 104
 Jaish-e-Mohammad 48
 Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Hind 5
 Jammu 14, 37
 Jammu and Kashmir 1, 2, 4, 5, 10, 29, 36, 48, 53, 56, 57, 96, 98, 108, 110, 134; migration to Britain 117–119; United States proposal 120
 Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS) 66, 67
 Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) 11, 14, 48, 103, 126, 129, 130, 131–133
 Jammu Kashmir National Liberation Front (JKNLF) 53, 124–126, 129
 Jammu Kashmir Vichar Manch 111
 Jammu Massacre 38
jannat nazeer 4
Jashn-e-Azadi 22
Jawan aur awam, aman hai muqam 61
 Jeelani, Aasia 53
 Jehangir Chowk–Rambagh expressway 73
 Jhelum River 40, 74, 76, 118
 Jhelum Valley Road 118
jihad 39, 40, 47
 journalism: Indian 63–64; Kashmiri 43, 53, 63, 93

- Kalhana 2, 94, 95, 98
 Kaloo, Muhammad 129
 Kargil dispute 38
karkuns 100
 Kashmir 1, 2, 15, 36; in 1990s 45; in 2010 16, 20, 24, 28, 29; arguments against self-determination 12, 13, 14; arguments on its independence 13, 14; bloody wars 10; history 28; Kashmiris as black proletariat 118; Kashmir-Punjab 3; Muslim population 11; plebiscite 11, 14, 48
 Kashmir Committee 5
 Kashmir Hindu Action Committee 107
 Kashmir Human Rights Committee (KHRC) 133
 Kashmiri diaspora 50
 Kashmiri Hindus *see* Kashmiri Pandits
 Kashmiri journalism 43, 53, 63, 93
 Kashmiri Muslim Conference 4
 Kashmiri Muslims 8, 54, 55, 58, 59, 96, 99, 103, 111
 Kashmiri Muslim 'separatists' 109
 Kashmiri Pandits 7–8, 91, 92, 96, 99, 100, 102, 109, 111
 Kashmiri Pandit Sangharsh Samiti (Committee for the Kashmiri Pandits' Struggle) 101
 Kashmiri refugees 39, 41, 42, 48, 49
 Kashmiri Shaivite 100
 Kashmiri Shaktism 100
 Kashmiri youth 8, 39, 58, 71, 132
Kashmir Reader 17
 "Kashmir Scars" 6
 Kashmir's sense of self 27, 28
Kashmir's War for Freedom 126, 127
 Kashmir Valley 3, 4, 8, 10, 11, 13, 36, 134
 Kashmir Workers Association (KWA) 128
 Kaul, Sahib 100
 Khan, Amanullah 128, 129, 131, 132
 Khan, Ghulam Ishaq 12
 Khan, Mohammad Ayub 141
 Khilafat communities 4, 5
 Khursheed, Aanas 35
 King Solomon 28
 Kishanganga dam 74, 76, 78
 Koestler, Arthur 19
 Kotli 38, 46

 Ladakh 2, 14, 36, 37, 109, 110
 Lakshar-e-Taiba 48
 Lalleshwari 96
 Lawrence, Walter 32
 Line of Control (LoC) 7, 36, 39, 46, 85

 Machil, Kupwara 18
 Madan, T. N. 100
 Madhok, Balraj 107

 Mahmud, Bashiruddin 5
 Maithil Kauls 100
 Majid (Majeed), Master Abdul 121, 126, 127
Majlis-e-Mashawarat 33
 Majlis-i-Ahrar 3, 4, 5, 6
makbooza Kashmir 10, 36, 40, 42, 46
 Malik, J. M. 105
 Manakpayan camp 40
 Mangla Dam 118
 Maoism 121
Mashriq 122
 Mattoo, Tufail Ahmad 16, 17
Mazar-e-Shohada 34
 media *see* journalism
mehrbani 62
 militancy 8, 40, 43, 44, 45, 47, 48, 78, 104–106
 Mirpur 119
 Mission Sahayata 63
 Mittal, Gita 105
 mobility 72, 75, 84, 85, 86
 Modi, Narendra 1, 3, 7, 58, 62, 71, 75, 110, 139
mohajirs 39, 43
 Mughal, Jalaluddin 40
 Muhammed, Bakshi Ghulam 2, 56
mujahids 39, 40, 43, 46
muhajireen 46
 Mukaram, Mohammad 43
 Musharraf Pervez 38, 48
 Muslim Conference, establishment of 5
 Muzaffarabad 38
 Muzaffarnagar Kand 23

 Naga 94
 Nainital 24
 National Database & Registration Authority (NADRA) 43
 National Disaster Relief Force 63
 National Hydropower Corporation (NHC)/National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC) 53, 72, 74, 77
 nationalist parties 49
 National Liberation Army 131
 National Liberation Front *see* Jammu Kashmir National Liberation Front (JKNLF)
 National Liberation Front of Eritrea 130
Naya Kashmir 56
 Nazish, Nazir 121, 122, 128
 NDTV 64
 Neelum Valley 43, 45, 46
 Nehru, Jawaharlal 2, 10, 11
 New Delhi 12, 15, 53
New York Times 8
Nilamata Purana 94, 97, 99
nun chai 6, 19, 26; *see also* "Cups of nun chai"

- online activism 20, 25
- Operation Gibraltar 38
- Operation Megh Rahat 63
- Operation *Sadbhavana* 58

- Pakistan 1, 8, 10, 29, 38, 116
- Pakistan-occupied Kashmir *see* Azad Kashmir
- Pakistan's People's Party 121
- Pandit Hindu Welfare System 102
- Panun Kashmir 108, 109, 111
- Partition of 1947 18, 20, 36, 37, 38, 56
- Pathankot Air Base attack 45
- Patnitop Tunnel 82
- People's Democratic Party 57, 109
- Permanent Court of Arbitration 76
- Plebiscite Front of Britain 123, 128
- political repression 57
- Postcard from Kashmir* 19
- Public Safety Act 25, 111, 125
- Pukhtoons 38
- Punjab 1, 5, 45, 48

- Qadir, Abdul 4
- Quran 4

- Radio Kashmir 140
- Rah, Sameer Ahmed 20
- Rajatarangini* 2, 94, 95, 97, 98, 99
- Ram cult 3
- Rampur Tiraha *see* Muzaffarnagar Kand
- Reconciliation, Relief and Rehabilitation of Migrant Kashmiris 111
- recovery narratives 62
- Red Mole* 123, 125
- rehabilitation policy 43
- Rig Veda 83

- Sada-i-Kashmir* 130
- Sarajevo 116
- Sarasvat Brahmins *see* Brahmins or Brahmins
- Sayeed, Mufti Mohammad 103
- Schofield, Victoria 103
- Security Council resolutions of 1948 116
- SELI 79, 82
- self-determination 11–14, 48, 53, 54, 56, 87, 116, 117, 120, 124, 126, 130, 133
- sexual violence 23, 24
- Shagu, Fehmeeda 141
- Shah, Amit 2
- Shaheed-e-Kashmir* 53
- Shaheed Malguzar* 34
- Sharif, Nawaz 75

- Sikander, Sultan 96
- Silence as Absence of Peace 31, 33
- Sindhu 83
- Singh, Maharaja Hari 5, 11, 37, 108
- social media 26, 40, 49, 64; *see also* online activism
- social media arrests 20; *see also* online activism
- sovereignty 14, 56, 76; dispute 74, 116, 119, 120; Dogra 143; Indian 3, 73, 79, 82, 111; Kashmiri 5, 6, 40, 53, 76, 127, 145; monolithic 131, 143
- sovereignty-association 6, 14, 15
- Srinagar 3, 8, 21–22, 73, 103
- Srinagar Jamia mosque 4
- Suhail, Mir 66
- Suleiman, Prophet 28
- Swarajya* 79, 82

- Tarbela dam 83
- Taryaby, Muhammad Younas 121, 122, 126, 127
- Tashkent agreement 120
- Tch'er' T'e be (The Sparrow's Sorrow)* 26
- tehreek* 53, 72
- Trotskyism 121
- Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM) 72, 79, 82
- Tufts University 68

- United Kashmir Liberation Front (UKLF) 121, 123, 124, 128
- United Nations 11, 14, 37, 116, 130
- Uri attack 45, 71
- Uttarakhand 23
- Uttarakhand Mahila Manch 24
- Uttar Pradesh 23

- Vale of Kashmir *see* Kashmir Valley
- Vajpayee, Atal Behari 2, 83
- Valley of Kashmir, The* 32
- Voice of Kashmir* 128, 129

- Wani, Burhan 17, 45
- War on Terror 45
- Wilson, H. H. 95
- women 22–23
- World Bank 7, 76
- Wullar barrage 75

- Yaarbal Books 17
- youth *see* Kashmiri youth
- Yuvak Sabha 107

- zulum* 18